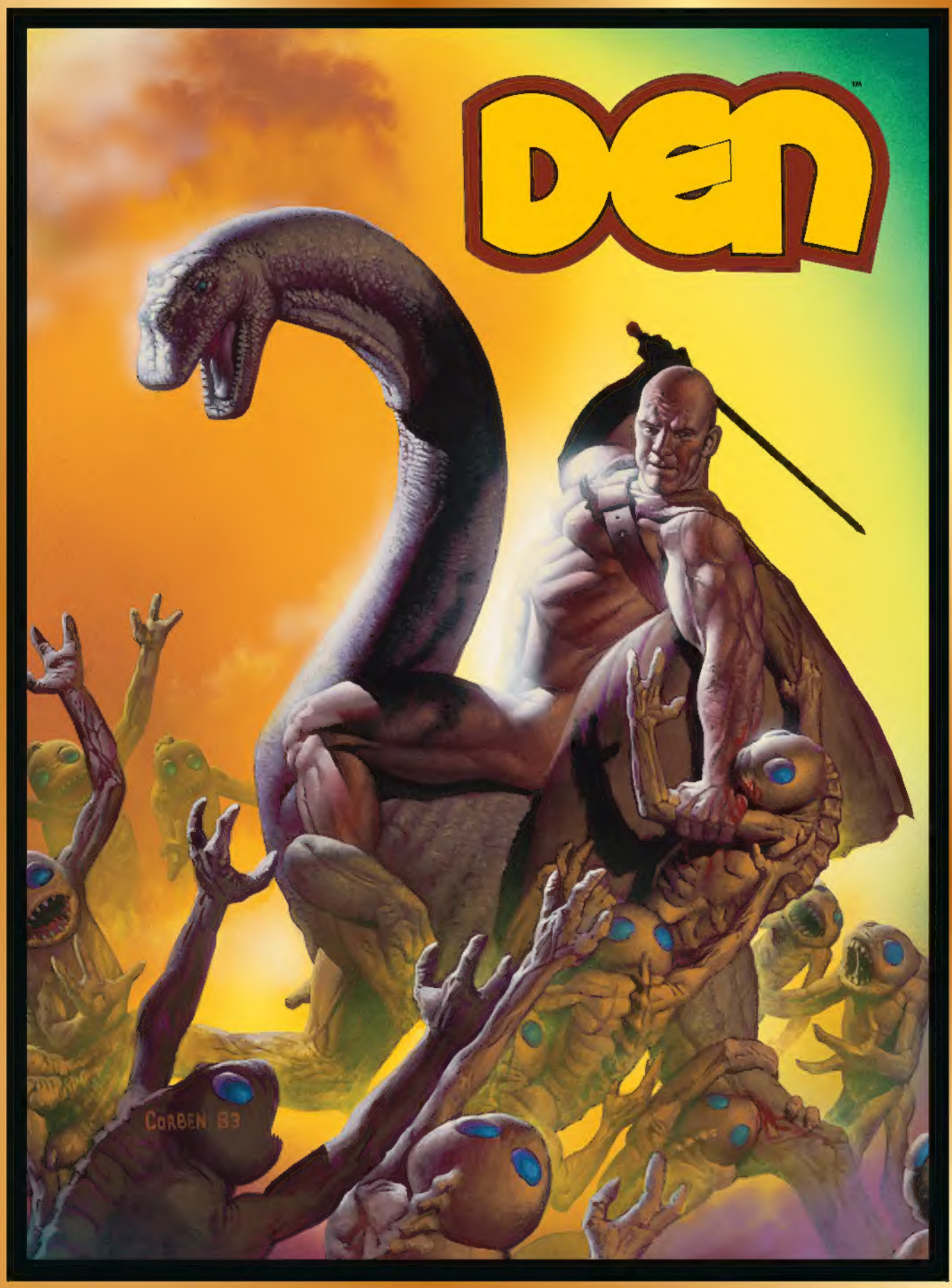

RICHARD CORBEN

Den™

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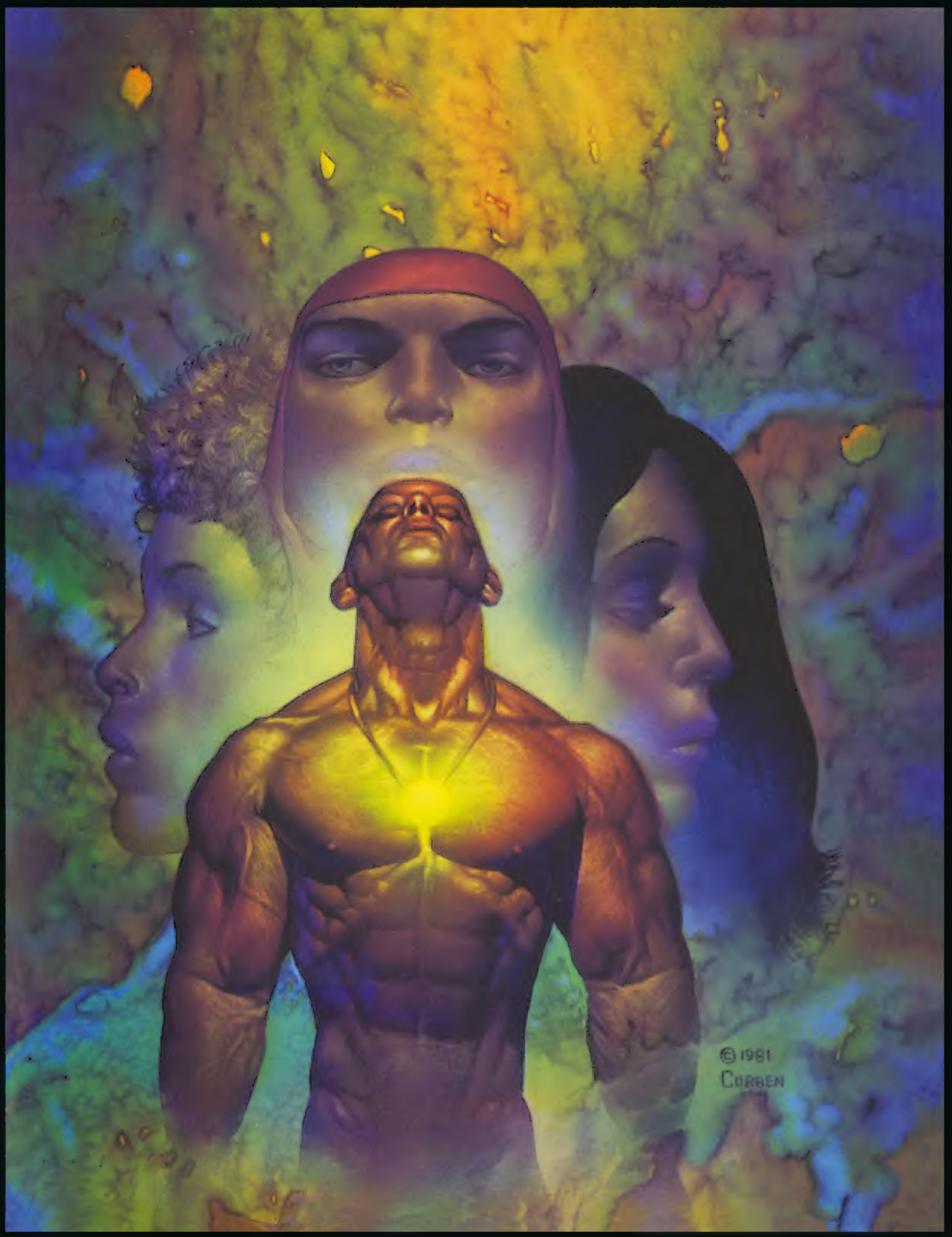

"Den's Women," 1981

Den™

VOLUME 2

MUVOVUM

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DEN VOLUME 2: MUVOVUM

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INTRODUCTION

WALT SIMONSON

The late writer/artist Richard Corben was unique. From the beginning of his career to its conclusion, there was nobody like him.

Back in the day, I was never a big under-ground comics reader. I was aware of them but just didn't see many. I liked the usual suspects when I did find them—Crumb, Moscoso, Holmes, Jaxon—but finding underground comics was difficult where I was living at the time, difficult enough that I didn't really search for them, and most of the genre with its stories and artists remained unfamiliar to me for a number of years. And although I eventually discovered Corben's comics in the undergrounds, that wasn't my introduction to his art.

Corben's work on Den, the main male character in his series of fantasy stories and graphic novels, began, as far as I know, with a short animated film called *Neverwhere*. I used to attend SF conventions in the long-ago days of my participation in SF fandom, and I saw the film during one of the many film programs SF conventions run. I thought the cartoon was amazing, and it was like nothing I had ever seen

before. A whole different level from a Disney or a Fleischer cartoon. And it was a film that Corben apparently drew entirely on his own.

At the time, I didn't connect the animated film with any sort of work in the comics medium.

However, somewhere along the way, I stumbled across a copy of a thirty-two-page black-and-white underground called *Richard Corben's Rowlf*, published by Rip Off Press. I didn't realize that I'd seen Corben's work before, but as with the cartoon short, what I was holding in my hands was like nothing I'd ever seen before. The artwork was masterfully drawn with sophisticated tone work. It contained brilliant storytelling, filled with images of sex and violence. It sported a military influence that seemed inspired by design elements of the German Wehrmacht of World War II. The comic blew me away. In a single-issue story, Corben created an entire world.

After I discovered *Rowlf*, I began to sit up and pay attention. I dug a little deeper into the underground comix scene and uncovered various black-and-white stories by Corben, scattered across a number of titles. And eventually, I stumbled across the first of his *Den* graphic novels, *Neverwhere*, an expansion of his original animated short. I finally made the connection!

Like *Rowlf*, *Den* was a spectacularly complete realization of a world like I had never seen before. It was visually electric, often sexual, sometimes extremely violent. Corben used color to create a three-dimensional theater of sensual images that exploded off the page. The original *Den* graphic novel was serialized in *Heavy Metal* in the United States in the late 1970s. A few years later, Corben returned to Den's world and began a new serialized story that would eventually become *Den 2: Muvovum*.

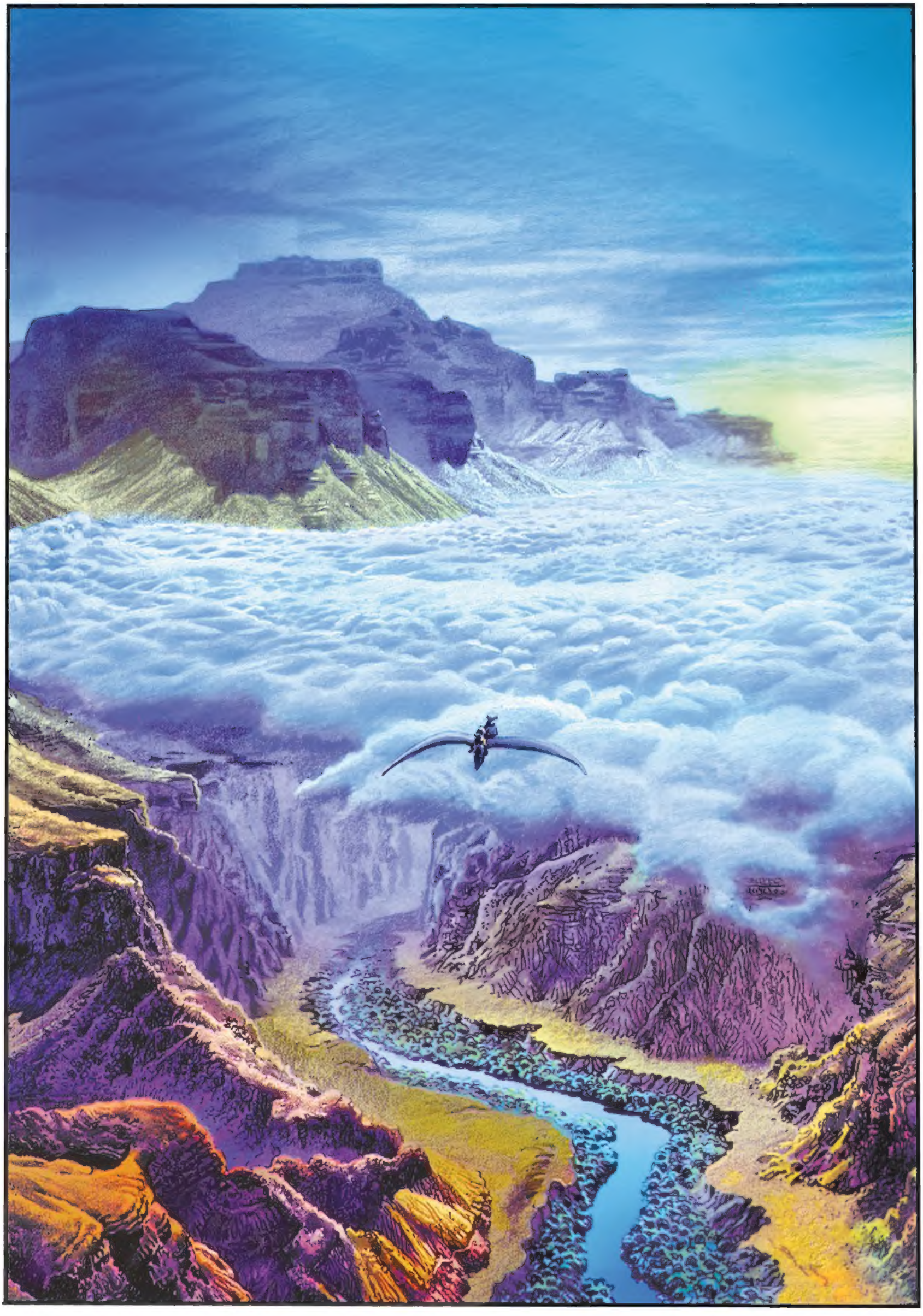
As with his earlier work, *Den 2* was a masterfully convincing visualization of Den's world as seen by Corben. However, with *Muvovum*, he elected to enlarge the geography of his original work, creating lands beyond Neverwhere, including Muvovum as well as several other realms. He expanded Den's world to the size of a small continent and provided a map with a key, pinpointing various locations for the events that occurred within the story. Muvovum was itself a realm ruled by a hallucinogenic monster commanding an army of drone-like beings ready to overrun the world.

Den's involvement in the story begins with a struggle about personal relationships and slowly expands to a confrontation with an existential threat to all those who live in Neverwhere. There is a fever-dream quality about the book, as it follows its own story logic with a pacing that is pure Corben, realized once more with his three-dimensional art. The graphic novel reads like something that—especially for its time in the early 1980s—was unique in comics. It was the gift of Richard Corben's singular voice, as both a writer and an artist. And he was not unappreciated in his lifetime. In 2018, the Angoulême International Comics Festival in France awarded Corben their Grand Prix for his work.

There was really nobody like him.

One final note: I read the graphic novel in its original serialized form when it was first published in *Heavy Metal*. I've had a copy of the collected edition in my library for years. And only now, when I was rereading it in order to write this introduction, did I realize that the name, Muvovum, is a palindrome! Now you won't have to make this discovery almost forty years after you've read the comic. You're welcome.

Walter Simonson
New York, December 2022



KATH, WHAT'S WRONG? I JUST WANT TO PLAY AROUND LIKE WE USED TO.

NO, DAVID. I'M NOT A TOY. AND DON'T CALL ME ***KATH.*** MY NAME IS KATHERINE. FROM NOW ON, I WANT TO BE CALLED KATHERINE OR KATHY.

WELL, MY NAME IS ***DEN,*** NOT DAVID. DAVID ELLIS NORMAN IS ANCIENT HISTORY.

I WISH YOU'D GROW UP AND STOP PLAYING YOUR FANTASIES.

IT SEEMS TO ME YOU'VE GOT SOME STRANGE FANTASIES YOURSELF. BUT DO I COMPLAIN? ***NOOOOOOOO!***

AND WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT?

YOUR HAIR FOR ONE THING. IT USED TO BE SO LONG AND BEAUTIFUL--

LOOK, BUSTER, BEAUTY IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER. BESIDES THAT, MY HAIR IS MY OWN PERSONAL PROPERTY, SO DON'T TELL ME HOW TO WEAR MY HAIR.

WHAT ABOUT THESE CLOTHES? WHY DO WE HAVE TO WEAR CLOTHES THAT COVER EVERYTHING?

SO, MISTER ***PERVERT*** DOESN'T LIKE TO WEAR CLOTHES, *EH?* HE LIKES TO GO AROUND WITH EVERYTHING HANGING OUT. WHERE I COME FROM, YOU'D BE ARRESTED FOR THAT.

I JUST LIKE TO LOOK AT YOU. YOU USED TO LIKE TO LOOK AT ME.

WELL, I DON'T NOW. YOUR APPEARANCE COMMUNICATES YOUR PERSONALITY AND, DAVID, BEFORE I STARTED DRESSING YOU, YOU LOOKED...SO BIG, SO ARROGANT AND PUGNACIOUS, SO DOMINANT...YOU LOOKED LIKE SOME OVERDEVELOPED, SUPER BREEDING ***STUD.***

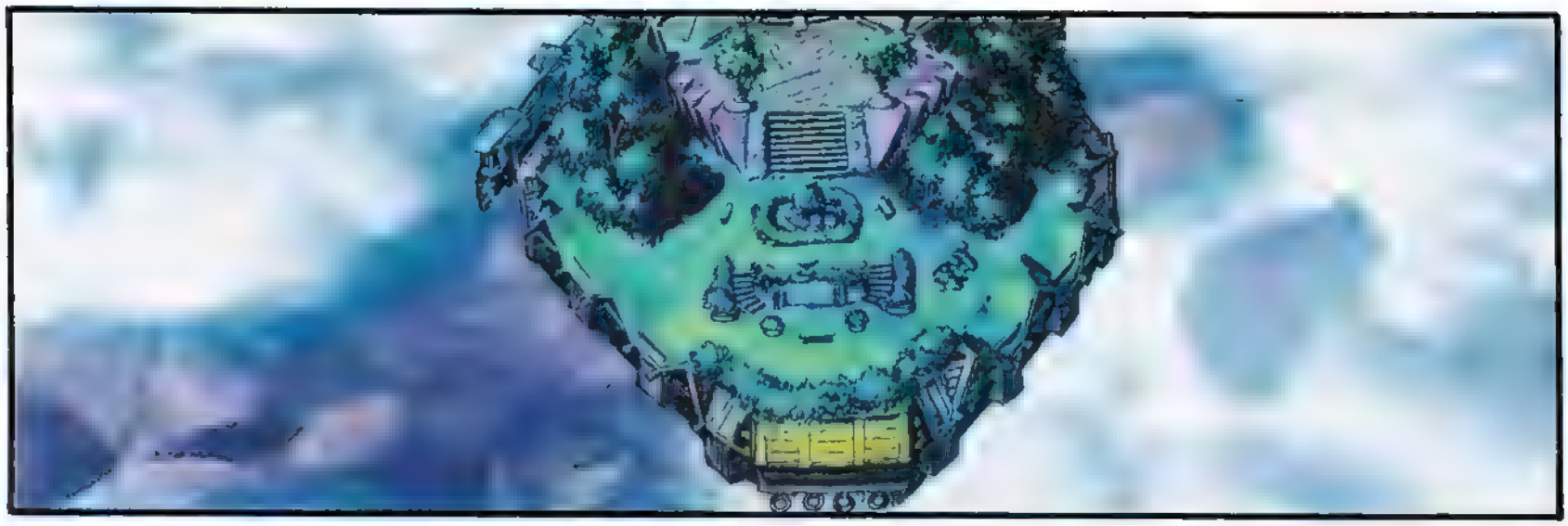
AM I SO ARROGANT? OR ANY OF THOSE OTHER THINGS...? ***HEY,*** WHAT'S WRONG WITH BEING A STUD? YOU USED TO LIKE ME TO BE A STUD. YOU USED TO LOVE ME. I HAVEN'T CHANGED. YOU'VE CHANGED.

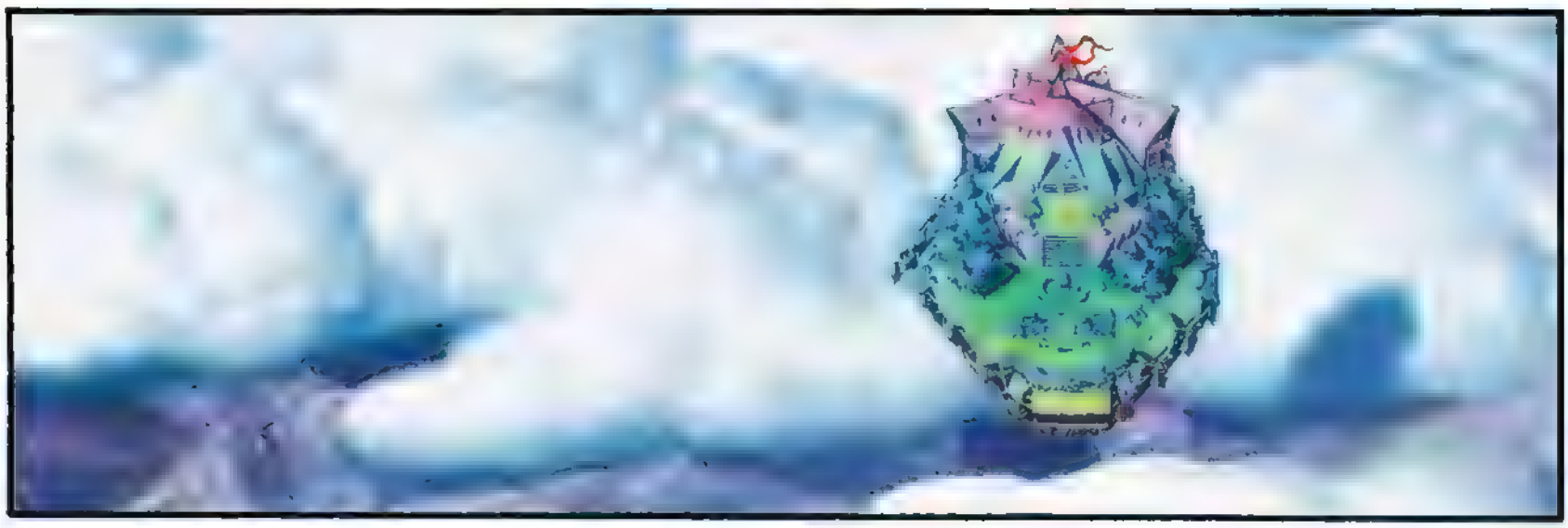
YES, I'VE CHANGED, DAVID. I'M NOT THE SAME PERSON I WAS. I WAS A CHILD. THEN I THOUGHT IT WAS ALL RIGHT TO BE YOUR PLAYTHING AND DO ANYTHING YOU WANTED ME TO. I'VE GROWN IN THE YEARS WE'VE BEEN HERE.

I'M AN ADULT, A REAL PERSON. I DO WHAT I WANT NOW, NOT WHAT ANYONE ELSE TELLS ME TO DO.

I GUESS YOU DON'T MUCH CARE FOR NEVERWHERE EITHER.

THAT'S RIGHT, DAVID. I'D GIVE ANYTHING TO GET OUT OF THIS INSANE, MALE-ORIENTED NIGHTMARE.





THERE'S ZEGIUM, GRANDFATHER. YOU WERE RIGHT. THE WIND HAS CARRIED IT FURTHER SOUTH THAN WHEN WE LEFT.
YES, THE LODE METAL HASN'T MUCH GUIDING POWER ANYMORE.

WE MUST WASTE NO TIME. I'VE GOT TO STUDY MY OLD MAPS OF MUVOVUM.
THE RUNES FORETOLD THAT THE EVIL QUEEN HAS LEARNED OF THE NAR STONES' HIDING PLACE THROUGH SOME MAGIC SPELL. THAT WOMAN HAS SOME TROOPS SEARCHING FOR THE ABANDONED DRAMITE HIVE EVEN NOW.
TARN, WE'RE IN DEEP TROUBLE IF SHE SUCCEEDS WITH HER PLANS.

DONNG

DONNG

DONNG

THERE! ZEG IS BACK. HE SAID HE'D HAVE SOMETHING IMPORTANT TO TELL US.

MUUTA, SEE! I BROUGHT GRANDFATHER BACK WITHOUT A HITCH. A PERFECT CHAUFFEURED FLIGHT.

YES, TARN. WE'RE ALL PROUD THAT YOU DIDN'T FALL.

LET GO OF ME. I CAN MANAGE.

SCON, COME WITH ME TO THE STUDY. WE'VE SOME VITAL MATTERS TO DISCUSS.

YES, FATHER.

TARN, TELL EVERYONE THERE WILL BE A MEETING WITHIN THE HOUR IN THE MAIN HALL.

YES, GRANDFATHER.

HE WAS MOST ANXIOUS ABOUT SOMETHING HE DISCOVERED IN THE RUNE VAULTS. WE'LL SOON KNOW.

DEN AND KATH HAVE BEEN FIGHTING AGAIN. LOOK! WHAT'S HE DOING?

HE'S TAKING HIS CLOTHES OFF.

I'VE NEVER SEEN HIM NUDE, SINCE I CAME HERE.

MUUTA, YOU DON'T WANT TO SEE HIM NAKED!

I THINK I DO. *WUFF!*

GIVE ME YOUR ATTENTION, PLEASE. WE HAVE A VERY GRAVE MATTER AT HAND. BUT FIRST, A SHORT REVIEW. NEARLY FOUR YEARS AGO, THE SELF-APPOINTED QUEEN OF NEVERWHERE POSSESSED THE LOCNAR, A SCEPTER OF INCREDIBLE MAGIC POWER.

WITH IT SHE SOUGHT TO BRING THE COSMIC DEMON GOD, ULUHTC, INTO THIS WORLD TO MAGNIFY HER STRENGTH A THOUSANDFOLD. THANKS TO OUR HONORED GUEST, DEN, THE CATACLYSM WAS AVERTED AND THE SCEPTER DESTROYED.

TRUE TO HER NATURE, THE QUEEN BEGAN AGAIN. I FORESAW THE HIDEOUS PERIL AND TRIED TO GIVE HER COUNTERFEIT MATERIALS FOR HER NEW SCEPTER. THE CRAFTY BITCH LEARNED THE TRUTH AND DEN HAD TO SAVE MY OWN LIFE. FOR THAT I'VE GIVEN HIM THE SHELTER OF ZEGIUM FOR AS LONG AS HE WISHES.

NOW THE REQUIRED TIME INTERVAL IS NEARLY COMPLETE, AND THE QUEEN GATHERS THE INGREDIENTS TO FORGE LOCNAR'S BROTHER. THE MOST IMPORTANT OF THESE INGREDIENTS ARE THE NAR STONES. THE STONES ALONE ARE CAPABLE OF MANY UNUSUAL FEATS. I HAVE LEARNED THAT THE QUEEN SUSPECTS THE NAR STONES' LOCATION. AS I SPEAK, A PARTY OF HER SUBHUMAN ARMY APPROACHES THE HIDING PLACE IN MUVOVUM.

FATE HAS CHOSEN US. WE MUST KEEP THE STONES FROM THE QUEEN. TEN VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED FOR THIS MISSION. MY SON SCON WILL BE WAITING AT THE DOCK TO LEAD YOU IN ONE HOUR. YOU ARE DISMISSED NOW.

I'M VOLUNTEERING...MUUTA, I SAID I'M GOING ON THIS DANGEROUS MISSION...DAMN IT, MUUTA, STOP STARING AT DEN AND LISTEN TO ME.

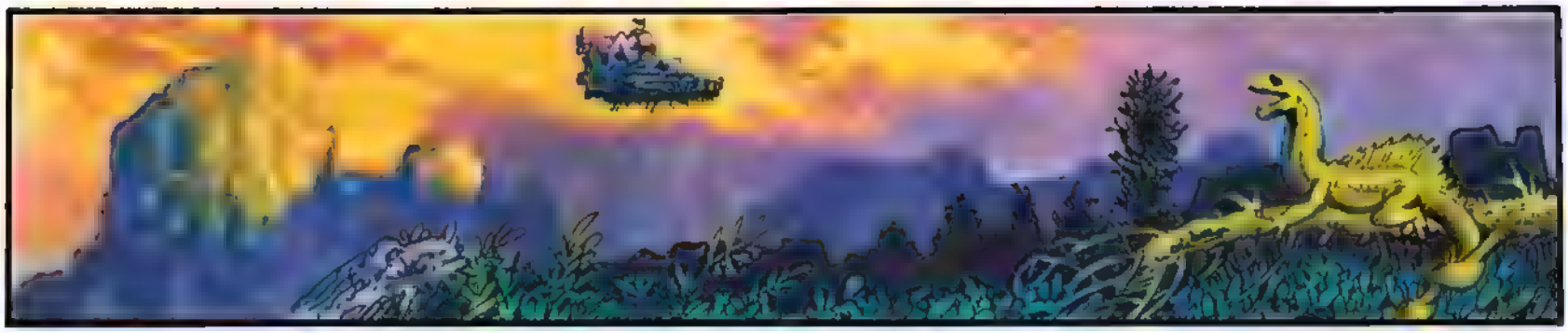
GET YOUR HANDS OFF ME.

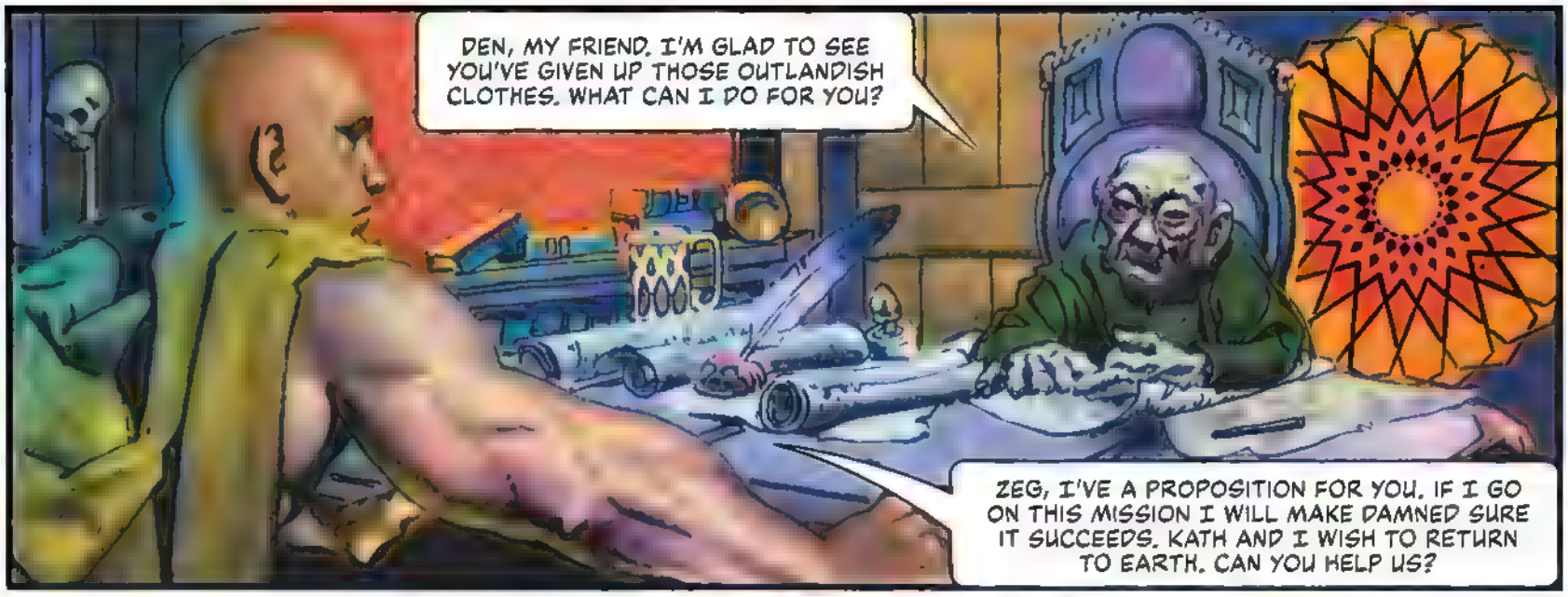
AWW, MUUTA, WE ARE PROMISED TO BE BETROTHED. I WISH YOU WOULD THINK ABOUT THAT AND BE NICE TO ME.

THAT WAS TO BE A POLITICAL ARRANGEMENT I WAS DISCUSSING WITH OLD ZEG. IT IS NOT FINAL. I'M NOT SURE THE PROPOSED ALLIANCE IS WORTH PUTTING UP WITH YOU.

I'M GOING TO SPEAK TO ZEG.

YOU NEVER STOP PLAYING THE HERO, DO YOU? DON'T VOLUNTEER TO IMPRESS ME. I'M PAST THAT STAGE.

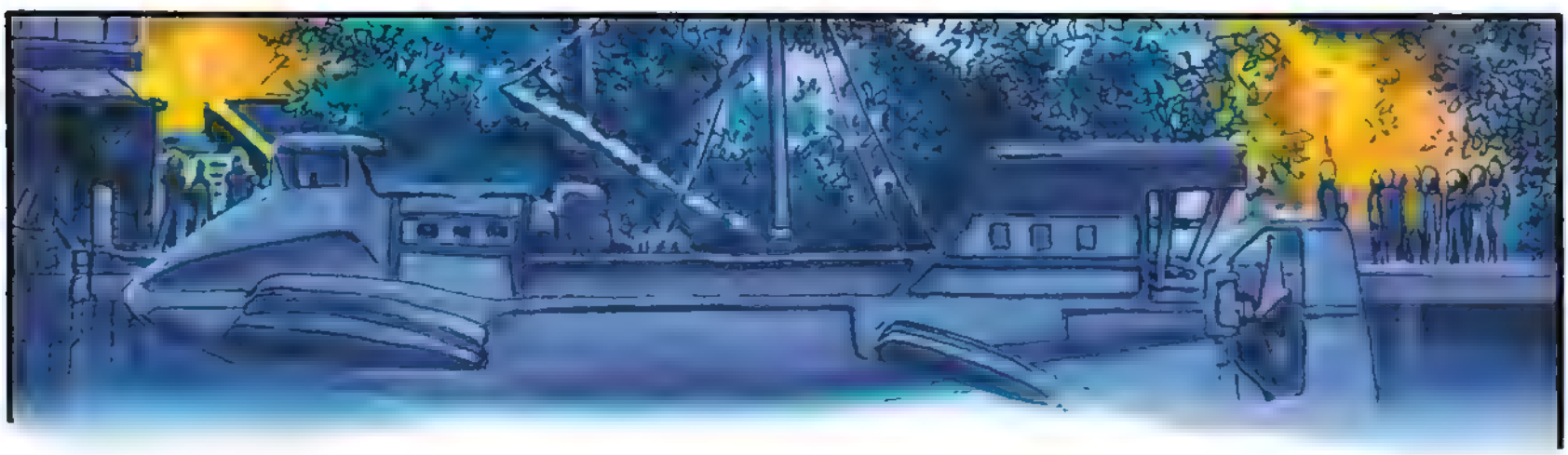



DEN, MY FRIEND. I'M GLAD TO SEE YOU'VE GIVEN UP THOSE OUTLANDISH CLOTHES. WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU?
ZEG, I'VE A PROPOSITION FOR YOU. IF I GO ON THIS MISSION I WILL MAKE DAMNED SURE IT SUCCEEDS. KATH AND I WISH TO RETURN TO EARTH. CAN YOU HELP US?

RETURN TO EARTH? DEN, I THOUGHT YOU HAD COME TO LOVE NEVERWHERE.
YES, I HAVE...BUT...THIS IS MOST PAINFUL FOR ME...I DON'T THINK WE HAVE ADJUSTED AS WELL AS I FIRST THOUGHT.

I SEE. YES, THE TRANSFERENCE CAN BE DONE...WITH ONE OF THE NAR STONES. I HADN'T WISHED TO USE THEM, BUT TO DESTROY THEM AT LAST. IN THIS CASE I WILL ALLOW IT.
THANK YOU, ZEG. I WONDER ABOUT SOMETHING. WHY DIDN'T YOU DESTROY THE STONES LONG AGO?

THAT'S A QUESTION I'VE PONDERED ENDLESSLY OVER THESE YEARS. PERHAPS SOMETHING WITHIN ME COVETED THE POWER.



HELMSMAN, BEAR THREE POINTS NORTHWEST.
THIS WILL PROVE TO MUUTA THAT I AM WORTHY...THAT I AM AS GOOD AS DEN.
WE SHALL REACH OUR GOAL IN FOUR DAYS. PRAY THAT WE ARRIVE BEFORE THE QUEEN'S ELITE DAAGOR GUARD.

ACCORDING TO THOSE DISTANT LANDMARKS, WE ARE VERY NEAR. WE MUST NOW DESCEND INTO THIS INFERNAL FOG TO FIND THE ABANDONED DRAMITE HIVE. THE NAR STONES ARE HIDDEN THERE.

EVERYONE, KEEP A SHARP LOOKOUT FOR THE HIVE. IT IS A TOWER OF ABOUT A HUNDRED FEET. AND WATCH FOR THE DAAGOR SOLDIERS. NO LOUD TALKING, AND KEEP YOUR WEAPONS AT HAND.

DEAD SLOW!

HELMSMAN, NOT TOO LOW!

THERE, TO THE LEFT!

CIRCLE ONCE! LOOK FOR ANY SIGN OF THE QUEEN'S TROOPS.

LANDING PARTY! SCON, MYSELF, NORK, BLATZ, AND...TARN. LET'S GO! EVERYONE ONBOARD BE READY TO FIGHT OR RUN.

DEN, THEY'VE BEEN HERE. LOOK, TRACKS EVERYWHERE.

WE MUST ENTER IMMEDIATELY. PERHAPS THEY DID NOT FIND THE STONES.

I DON'T LIKE THIS. THESE ARE THE TRACKS OF BATTLE.

HERE'S THE ENTRANCE.

GOD, THIS THING IS HUGE.

OH, THIS WAS JUST A SMALL OUTPOST.

DURING THE AGE OF DRAMITES, OVER FIVE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, THERE WERE HUNDREDS OF TOWERS LARGER THAN THIS ONE.

THE DRAMITES WERE A SMALL RACE?

THIS WAS A WORKERS' ENTRANCE. THEY WERE SMALLER THAN THE OTHERS.

HOW MUCH FURTHER, SCON?

THE STONES ARE IN THE CHAMBER ABOVE, I BELIEVE.

WAIT, WHAT'S THAT?

BRING THE LAMP NEAR.

BONES!

BY THE GODS! THEY'VE BEEN FRESHLY BUTCHERED!

THESE ARE THE REMAINS OF THE DAAGOR GUARD! BUT WHO DID THIS...OR WHAT?

EVERYBODY QUIET! I HEAR SOMETHING STRANGE.

--FROM THE DEPTHS!

SKITTER

SKRIT

NO! NO! THEY'VE RETURNED!

WHAT IS IT?

HURRY, SCON! TO THE UPPER ROOM!

SKITTER

SKRIT

SCREECH

DRAMITES!

SSSCCRRREEEEAAAHH!

WE'LL HOLD THEM BACK AS LONG AS WE CAN.

SEARCH FOR THE STONES ABOVE, SCON. THEN SEEK ESCAPE ON THE TOWER ROOF.

BAM

BAM

BLAM

BANG

SSKKRRROOOUUGH!

POW

BLAM

MORE OF THE QUEEN'S MEN.

UUUNH.

THERE!

MERCY... PLEASE!

KILL US! FOR GOD'S SAKE!

MY PLEASURE.

SLITCH

CHUK

THUK

HOLD THEM BACK! I HAVE THE STONES!

UP HERE! WE CAN MAKE A BETTER DEFENSE!

AAAGH!

NO USE, WE'RE FINISHED!

NOW, WHERE IS THAT SHIP?

YOOO HOOO! UP HERE! HELP! HELP!

HELP! HELP! HELP!

UP THERE ON TOP. HURRY!

HELP ME ABOARD. I HAVE THE STONES!

WHERE ARE THE OTHERS?

THEY ARE DONE FOR! LET US GO!

DRAMITES! DRAMITES HAVE RETURNED AND KILLED OUR MEN.

WAIT! TARN IS COMING...! AND DEN!

DEPART! WE CAN NOT SAVE HIM. THAT HORDE IS POURING OUT OF THERE.

I CAN GET CLOSE ENOUGH FOR HIM TO JUMP. I'M COMING AROUND.

BAM

BAM

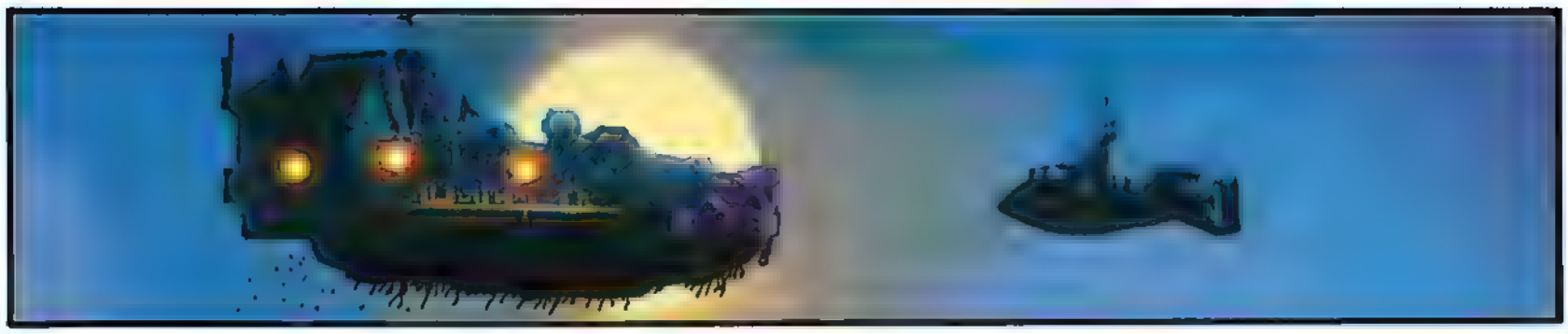
DEN! DEN! JUMP!

HELP, I'M FALLING!

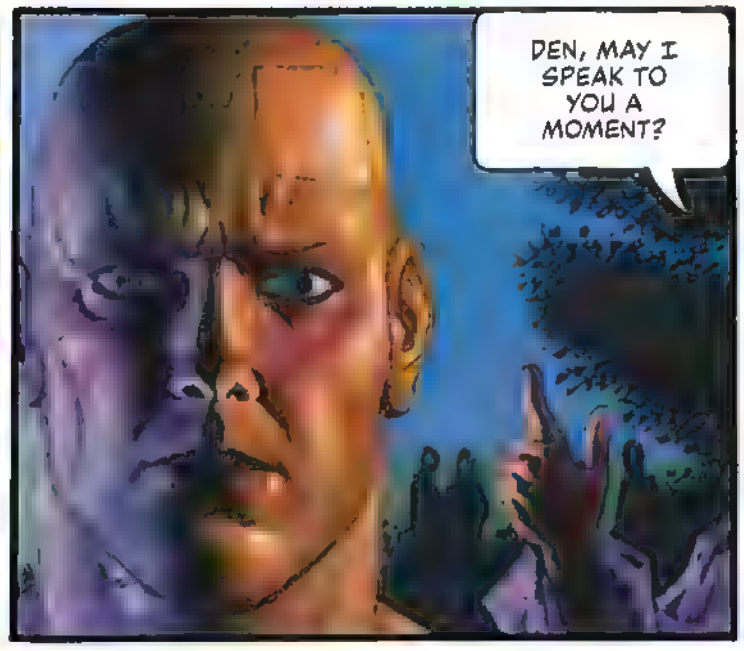
AAAAAAAAH!

GET HIM ABOARD AND SEE TO THEIR WOUNDS.

TARN, YOU SAVED MY LIFE!



THANK YOU, DEN. WITH YOUR HELP, I WAS ASSURED OF SUCCESS. YOU AND KATH COME TO MY STUDY TOMORROW AT NOON. YOUR WISH WILL BE FULFILLED.


DEN, MAY I SPEAK TO YOU A MOMENT?

MUUTA.
DEN, I KNOW YOU INTEND TO LEAVE NEVERWHERE. COME TO THE GARDEN. WHAT I HAVE TO SAY IS MOST IMPORTANT.

I'LL SOON BE RETURNING TO MUUTARAN AND MY BEAUTIFUL ISLAND ESTATE, MINIMUUT. YOU'D LOVE IT THERE, DEN. I AM RATHER RICH...AND ATTRACTIVE.

YES.

IT IS COMMON KNOWLEDGE THAT YOU AND KATH ARE HAVING SOME DIFFICULTIES.

MUUTA, WHAT ARE YOU GETTING AT?

DON'T GO, DEN. LET KATH GO AND YOU CAN COME AND STAY WITH ME.

MUUTA, I APPRECIATE YOUR FEELINGS AND YOUR OFFER BUT...

HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN, DEN...SINCE YOU'VE HAD SOME GOOD PLAY?

NO, MUUTA! I AM LOYAL TO KATH.

YOU FOOL! I WANT YOU. I'LL DO ANYTHING YOU WANT.

SHIT!

KATH...ERINE, I AM GOING TO TAKE YOU BACK TO EARTH.

DAVID? REALLY? DO YOU MEAN IT?

YES, KATHERINE. I LOVE YOU.

OH THANK YOU, DAVID. I NEVER THOUGHT IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE.

NO, DAVID. NO SEX. I PROMISED MYSELF I'D NEVER GIVE MY BODY AGAIN UNTIL I WAS A FREE AND EQUAL PARTNER.

IF WHAT YOU SAY IS TRUE, YOU NEED ONLY TO WAIT A WHILE LONGER.

NOW LIE DOWN AND TELL ME ABOUT IT AND YOUR TRIP.

YOU MUST BOTH CONCENTRATE ON EARTH. DEN, PUT THIS AROUND YOUR NECK, AND WHILE CLASPING HANDS, YOU SHOULD BOTH COUNT TO TEN, BUILDING YOUR CONCENTRATION WITH EACH NUMBER. THE COUNTING WILL SYNCHRONIZE YOUR MENTAL POWERS.

THE SYMPATHETIC VIBRATIONS OF THE NAR STONE WILL AMPLIFY THE POWER, AND YOU WILL INSTANTLY TRAVEL INTO YOUR OTHER UNIVERSE.

REMEMBER, DEN, YOU CAN RETURN THE SAME WAY.

GOODBYE, MY FRIENDS, AND THE BEST OF LUCK TO YOU.

ONE...TWO...THREE... FOUR...FIVE...

...SIX...SEVEN... EIGHT...NINE...TEN...

I HOPE YOU RETURN, DEN. WE'RE GOING TO NEED YOU.

TELL THE QUARTERMASTER WE NEED MORE GAZIR. THE LEVEL IS DIMINISHING AND WE'VE DIPPED TO UNDER EIGHTY METERS.

DAMN WOMEN! ALWAYS CHASING SOME BIG SUPERCOCK.

I GO OUT AND GET ***MANGLED*** BY THOSE THINGS AND ***THIS*** IS MY REWARD.

GODDAMNED BITCH! SIZE ISN'T EVERYTHING. I'LL TEACH HER THAT I'M A BETTER MAN THAN DEN.

MUUTA! WHERE IS SHE?

WHAM

SHE'S NOT HERE, SIR.

MISTRESS MUUTA PACKED UP AND LEFT THIS MORNING WITH HER ATTENDANTS.

OUTTA MY WAY!

RUN AND TELL LORD ZEG OR MASTER SCON.

NO, DO NOT BOTHER LORD ZEG. I WILL HANDLE THIS. FETCH THE CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD.

DEN IS GONE, AND NOW TARN...GOOD.

IF IT CAME TO A SECESSION, WHICH PEOPLE WOULD SIDE WITH ME, AND WHICH WITH THE OLD MAN?

AH, CAPTAIN DORT. I THINK WE WILL HAVE TO LOWER A GROUND SEARCH PARTY TO FIND MY DELINQUENT SON, TARN. IT SHALL CONSIST OF THE PEOPLE ON THIS LIST.

ALSO, WE NEED TO SEND ANOTHER GROUP TO WASTURAN TO REPLENISH OUR SUPPLIES. TAKE ZOG, BLEM, MUSS, THOB, KRAG, AND NAAP. YOU WILL LEAD THEM YOURSELF, DORT.

IT IS MASTER SCON'S ORDER. YOU FOUR RIDE IN THE DIRECTION OF MUUTARON AND SEARCH FOR MASTER TARN. IF YOU CAN'T FIND ANY TRACE IN FOUR DAYS, RETURN.

THIS IS KIND OF QUEER. THE ONLY PEOPLE LEFT ON ZEGIUM EXCEPT FOR THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN ARE SCON'S IMMEDIATE FAMILY AND SERVANTS.

THUD

EHE...? OH...BY THE GODS! WHAT A STORM! IS IT EVENING? WHAT MADE ME SLEEP SO LONG?

SOMETHING SEEMS ODD.

OH LORD ZEG, I'M SO WORRIED. MASTER SCON SENT THE MEN AWAY ON ERRANDS AND THE ISLAND SEEMS TO BE DRIFTING LOWER. WE DON'T UNDERSTAND THE MACHINERY.

DON'T FRET, DRENA. I'M SURE WE HAVE ENOUGH GAZIR TO LAST US FOR AT LEAST ANOTHER MONTH. NOW WILL YOU TELL SCON THAT I WISH TO SPEAK TO HIM.

BUT WE CAN'T FIND HIM EITHER, SIR.

PLEASE SEARCH AGAIN, MY DEAR.

SCON MISSING. WHAT IS HE UP TO?

CRASH!

THE QUEEN!

HELLO, ZEG!

SNAP

KA-THUMP

ALL RIGHT, YOU SNIVELING LITTLE BASTARD. I'M ONLY GOING TO TELL YOU THIS ONCE. GIVE ME THE NAR STONES OR I'M GOING TO START BREAKING BONES, BEGINNING WITH FINGERS, THEN WRISTS, ARMS, TOES, LEGS, RIBS, AND THEN I THINK I'LL WORK ON YOUR UGLY LITTLE FACE.

WAIT! WAIT, PLEASE! I HAVEN'T GOT THEM!

KRAK

AAARGH!

THWAK

GET BACK! KEEP AWAY FROM ME! GUARDS!

EEEEEEE

HAUGH!

WILD!

SWAP!
CRACK
CHOMP!
AAAAAAUGH!
STOP! I'LL GET THEM FOR YOU.

SPTUI
GONE! THEY'RE GONE...SCON.

I'VE HAD IT WITH YOU, ZEG.

GET OUT!

AND STAY OUT!

CRASH

YOUR MAJESTY--

JUST A MOMENT.

THUDGH

YES?

THE FLOATING ISLAND IS SECURED. THERE ARE NO MEN ABOARD.

THE STONES AREN'T HERE. BURN THE PLACE. WE'LL TRACK DOWN WHOEVER TOOK THEM.

LOOK! THERE HE IS. I TOLD YOU HE WOULD LOSE HIS WAY AND END UP IN MUVOVUM.

YOOOO! MASTER TARN, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

MODA, TAZ! THANK GOD, YOU'VE COME. THIS DAMNED FLIER GAVE OUT ON ME.

LORD ZEG AND MASTER SCON WILL BE VERY HAPPY TO SEE YOU'RE UNHARMED.

THEY'LL HAVE TO WAIT A WHILE LONGER TO SEE ME, BUT LOMB, TAZ, AND GREB CAN REASSURE THEM.

SIR?

MODA, YOU WILL ACCOMPANY ME TO MUUTARON. THE OTHER THREE CAN SHARE TWO HORSES RETURNING TO ZEGIUM.

BUT, SIR--

IT IS AN ORDER. BY YOUR OATH OF LOYALTY TO MY GRANDFATHER AND TO MY FATHER, YOU MUST OBEY.

EXCUSE ME, MASTER TARN, THE WAY TO MUUTARON CONTINUES EAST ANOTHER DAY BEFORE TURNING NORTH. THIS WAY LEADS DEEPER INTO MUVOVUM.

NONSENSE! EVEN YOU SERVANTS PERSIST IN TREATING ME LIKE A CHILD. I KNOW THE WAY TO MUUTARON.

DAMN IT, SIR, THAT'S THE LAST OF THE WATER.

HOW MANY DAYS, MODA?

THREE DAYS SINCE WE MADE THAT WRONG TURN, YOU FOOL.

MODA?

WE'RE WAY OUT OF KNOWN TERRITORY, THANKS TO YOU. I'M LEAVING YOU NOW. I'M GOING TO TRY TO FIND THE TRAIL. IF YOU'RE SMART, YOU'LL FOLLOW.

WAIT! I CAN'T GO ON. I'VE GOT TO REST.

C'MERE! YOU GOTTA GET ME OUT OF THIS.

WOUGH

GRRAOAWWR!

YAH!

WHIIINNNNN...

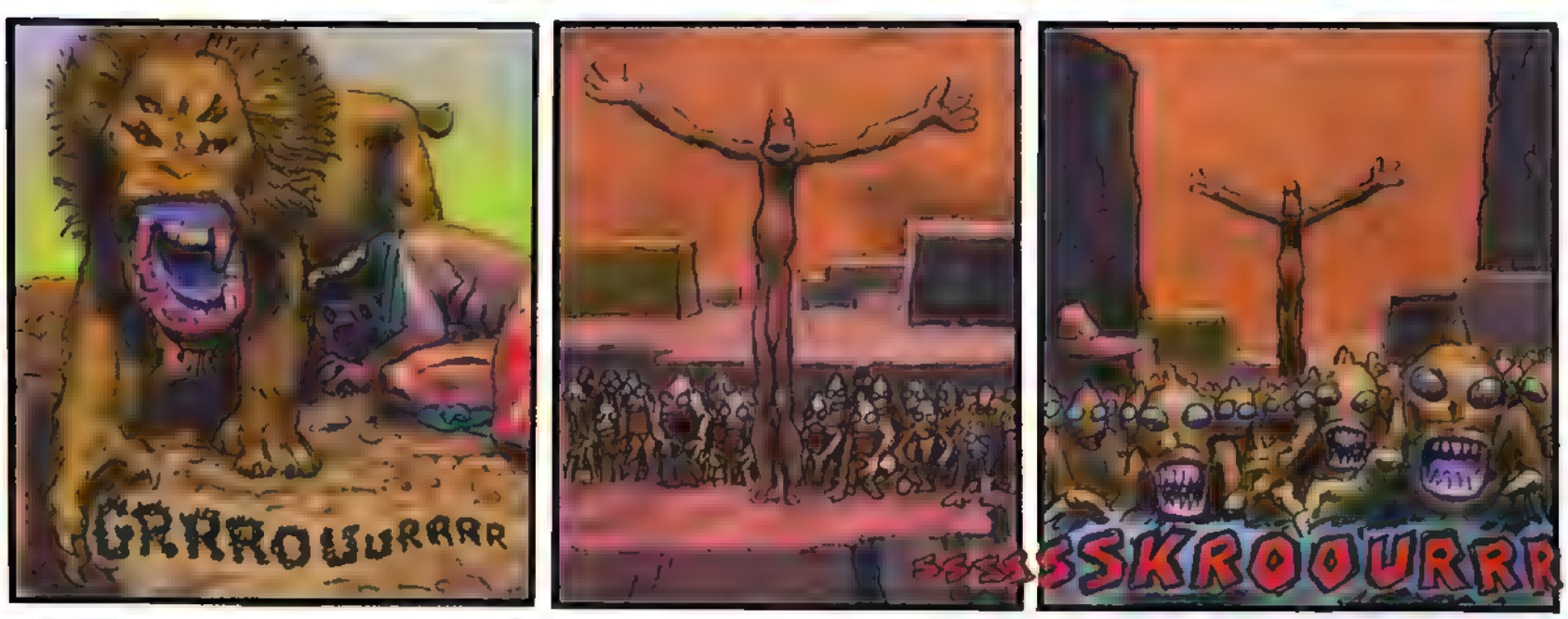
UUUURRROOUUGH

GROOUGH!

HURRH?

OH GOD, PLEASE!

AAAIEEE!
CHOMP


GRRROWURRRR
SSKROOURRR

ARGOWR!
SSSCCRROOUURRRRR

FINALLY COMING AROUND, ARE YOU?
MODA.
WE SHOULD HAVE GONE BACK TO ZEGIUM WITH THE OTHERS. EVEN BEING KILLED BY ROAD BANDITS WOULD BE BETTER THAN WHAT THESE DEVILS HAVE IN STORE FOR US.
MODA, WHERE ARE WE?
WE'VE BEEN DRAGGED DOWN INTO THE PITS OF MUVOVUM. WE'RE IN *HELL!*

OOOOH, MY WOUNDS. WHAT--?

WHILE YOU WERE ASLEEP, ONE OF THOSE MONSTROSITIES WAS DOING SOMETHING TO YOU. IT APPEARED TO BE LICKING YOUR WOUNDS.

IS THERE ANY WATER OR FOOD?

YES, THERE'S A TRICKLE OF WATER COMING OUT OF THE WALL. I THINK THAT POWDERY STUFF MIGHT BE FOOD.

MMM...BLAND, SLIGHTLY MUSTY. NOT TOO BAD, THOUGH.

TO FATTEN US UP, NO DOUBT.

THE DOOR! GET READY FOR THE SLAUGHTER!

WELCOME, MY FRIENDS. COME ON IN AND SIT DOWN. LET ME HAVE THEM BRING YOU A REFRESHMENT.

I'M REALLY SO GLAD YOU CAME. IT SEEMS LIKE YEARS SINCE I'VE HAD HUMAN COMPANY.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND. WHO ARE YOU? WHAT IS GOING ON HERE?

OH, PARDON ME. WHERE ARE MY MANNERS? I AM JORD. WHAT ARE YOUR NAMES?

I AM TARN OF ZEGIUM. THIS IS MY SERVANT, MODA.

I'M VERY GLAD TO MEET YOU, TARN... AND MODA.

OH, LOOK WHO HAS COME OUT TO SEE THE COMPANY. THIS IS JORDELLA. ISN'T SHE JUST THE CUTEST LITTLE THING?

THERE YOU ARE. IT'S HONEY WINE. TASTE IT! IT'S DELICIOUS.

PURR PUURR

KITCHY, KITCHY! SHE JUST LOVES BEING SCRATCHED ON HER CHIN.

JORDELLA, THIS IS TARN AND MODA. AREN'T YOU GLAD THEY CAME TO SEE US?

AWWW, LOOK AT THAT. SHE WANTS TO GET ACQUAINTED. HE-HE.

SNIFF SHLORP

DO YOU LIKE TARN, JORDELLA? IS HE THE BEST?

SNIFF SNIFF SHLORP

OH, I SEE. YOU LIKE MODA. GO AHEAD, SWEETIE.

KOOOOOOO SNARF SSSHHLOORP!

AAAG!

THE DAMNED THING BIT ME!

EEEEEEEEE THUD

HEY, WHAT?

YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE DONE THAT, MODA.

YOU'VE MADE JORDELLA ANGRY.

SSSSSSSSSS

SHE DOESN'T WANT YOU FOR HER LOVER NOW.

WAIT! WHAT IS HAPPENING HERE? LET US GO!

NO! NO! AAAAAAAAAAGGG!

AAAAARRRRGGHH!

TARN.

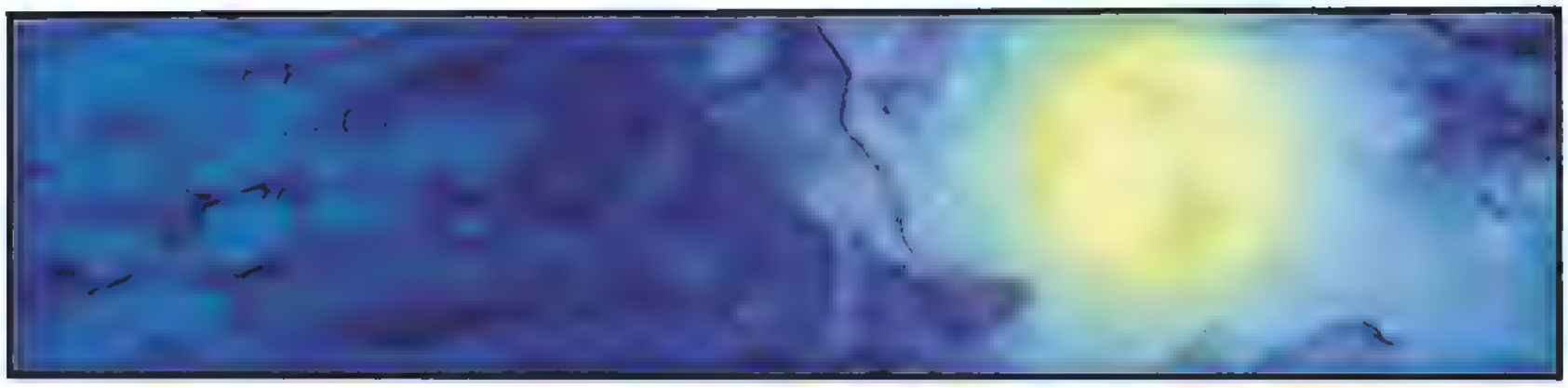
MUUTA, I FEAR I'LL NEVER SEE YOU AGAIN.

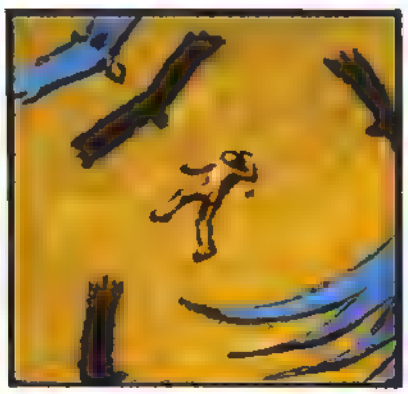
I'M SORRY, KATHERINE. I CAN'T BE WHAT YOU WANT ME TO BE.

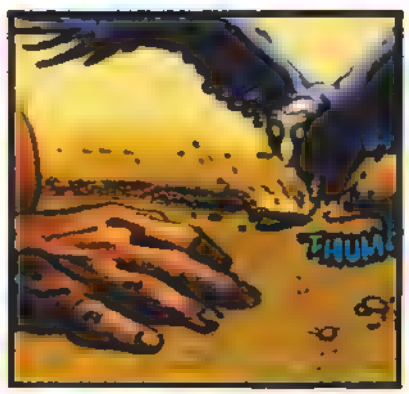
OH GOD! WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO ZEGIUM...AND ZEG?

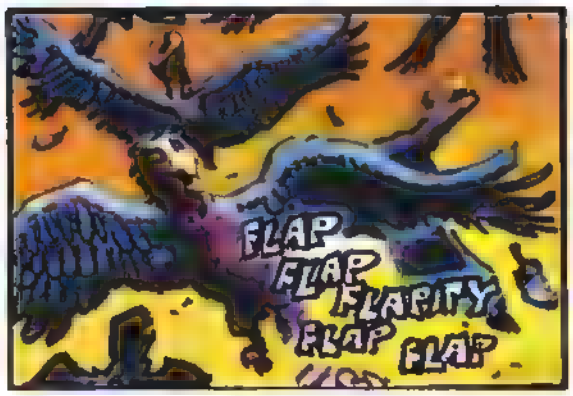
ZEG, SCON, MUUTA, DORT, MODA, LOME, TAZ...BLEM, KRAG...NAAP... ARE THEY ALL DEAD?

...AND TARN, HE SAVED MY LIFE. WOULD THEY STILL BE ALIVE IF I HAD STAYED?






THUM!


FLAP
FLAP
FLAPITY
FLAP
FLAP

BUCK UP, MY MAN. YOU'RE STILL ALIVE. YOUR WOUNDS HAVE HEALED.

DON'T WORRY. I DON'T THINK YOU'LL END UP LIKE MODA. YOU ARE TOO SMART.

I'M TREATED AS A KING, HERE AMONG THE DRAMITES. THEY'LL WORK THEMSELVES TO DEATH FOR MY EVERY WHIM.

I WAS ONCE A RUG MERCHANT IN THE WORLD OUTSIDE MUVOVUM. THEN I BROUGHT A CARAVAN THROUGH THESE ROCKY HILLS. THE DRAMITES CAPTURED US.

YOU SEE, THEY NEED US...US HUMANS. I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND THEN, AS YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND NOW.

SOME OF MY ASSOCIATES WERE REVOLTED BY OUR CAPTORS. THEY BECAME ROYAL FOOD...LIKE YOUR SERVANT. AS THE SURVIVORS LEARNED WHAT THEIR PURPOSE HERE WAS TO BE, THEY SENSELESSLY REBELLED... AND WERE ALSO EATEN.

I WAS DETERMINED TO SURVIVE AND I HAVE.

AS I SAID, THE DRAMITES WILL DO ANYTHING FOR ME...ALMOST. THERE IS ONE THING THEY WON'T DO THAT YOU MUST DO.

THUD

THERE IS A SECRET PASSAGE FROM THIS ROOM TO THE SURFACE THAT IS NEVER USED. YOU COULD ESCAPE THROUGH IT.

WHERE IS IT?

ITS LOCATION IS WRITTEN ON A SCRAP OF PARCHMENT IN MY ROBE POCKET.

THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY YOU'LL GET IT FROM ME.

CHUK!

SQUAGH

THANK YOU, MY FRIEND.

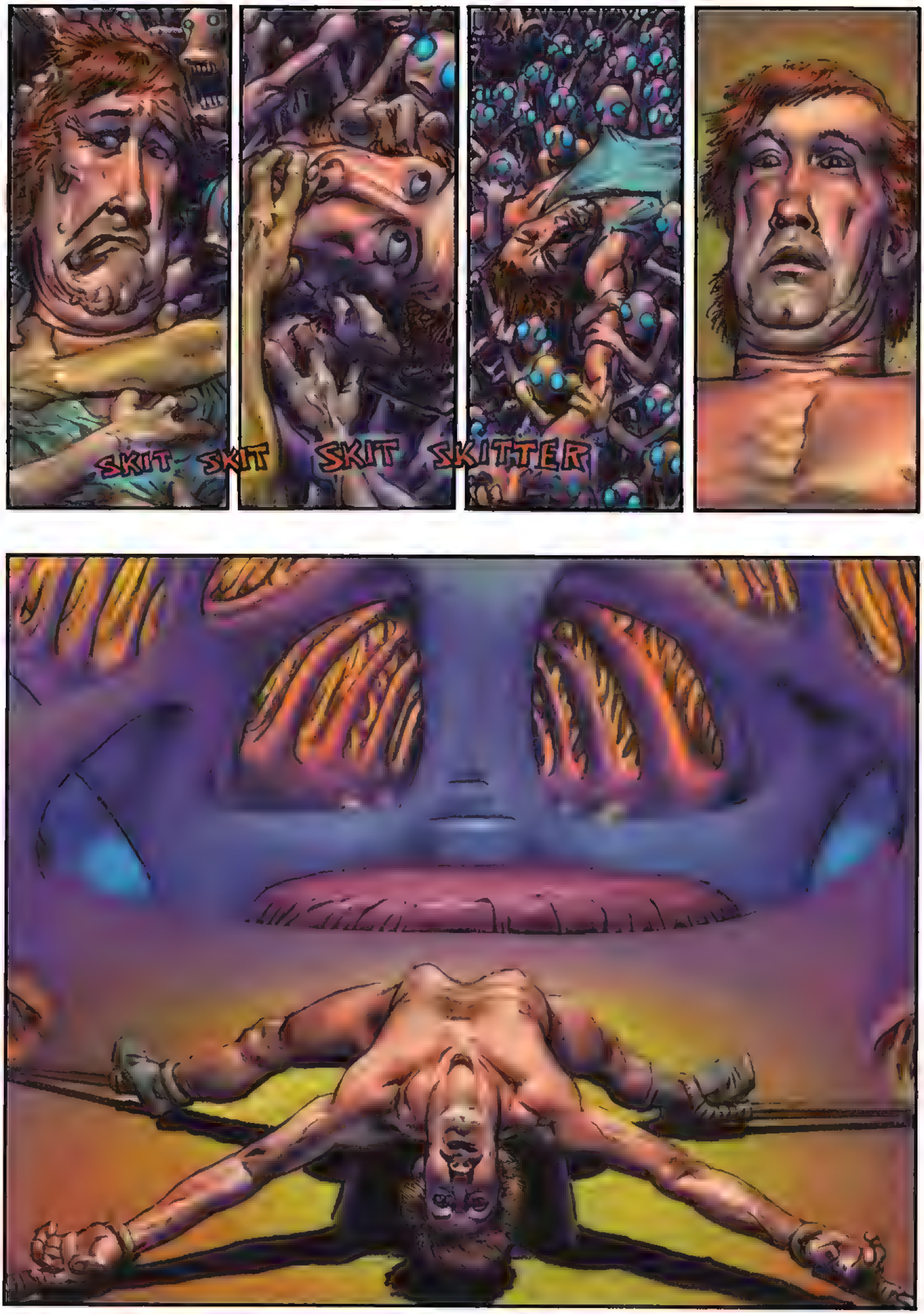
GURGLE GLUR

BUT THERE IS NO PARCHMENT...

GLUB GLUG BUBBLE

NO SECRET PASSA--

SCRRAAAUUGH!


SKIT
SKIT
SKIT
SKITTER

МИИТА.

NO, YOU'RE NOT MUUTA. YOU'RE THAT HIDEOUS CREATURE THAT ATE MODA.

MUUTA,
IT IS YOU.
IT IS YOU.

I LOVE YOU

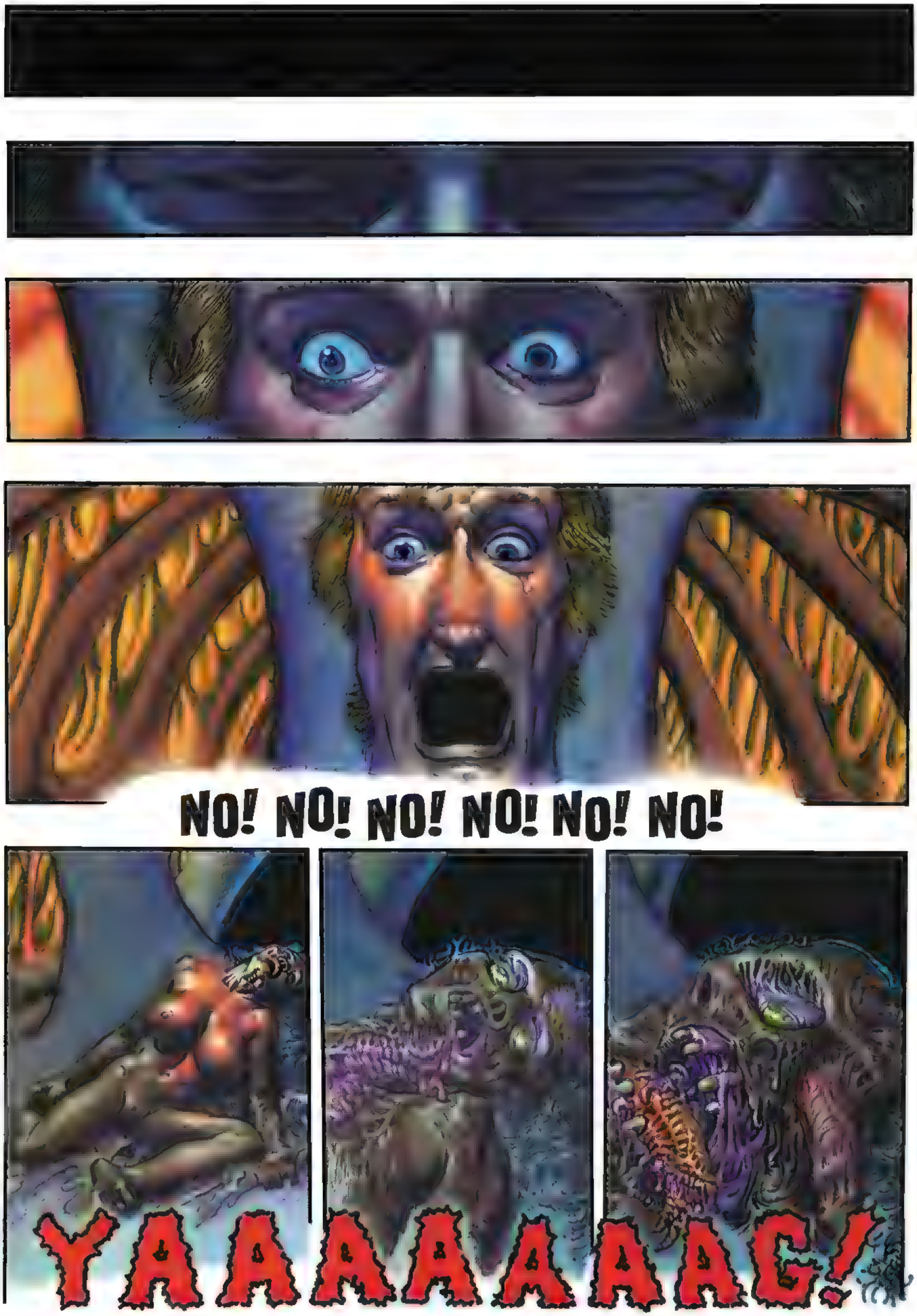
MUUTA.

YOU ARE MINE

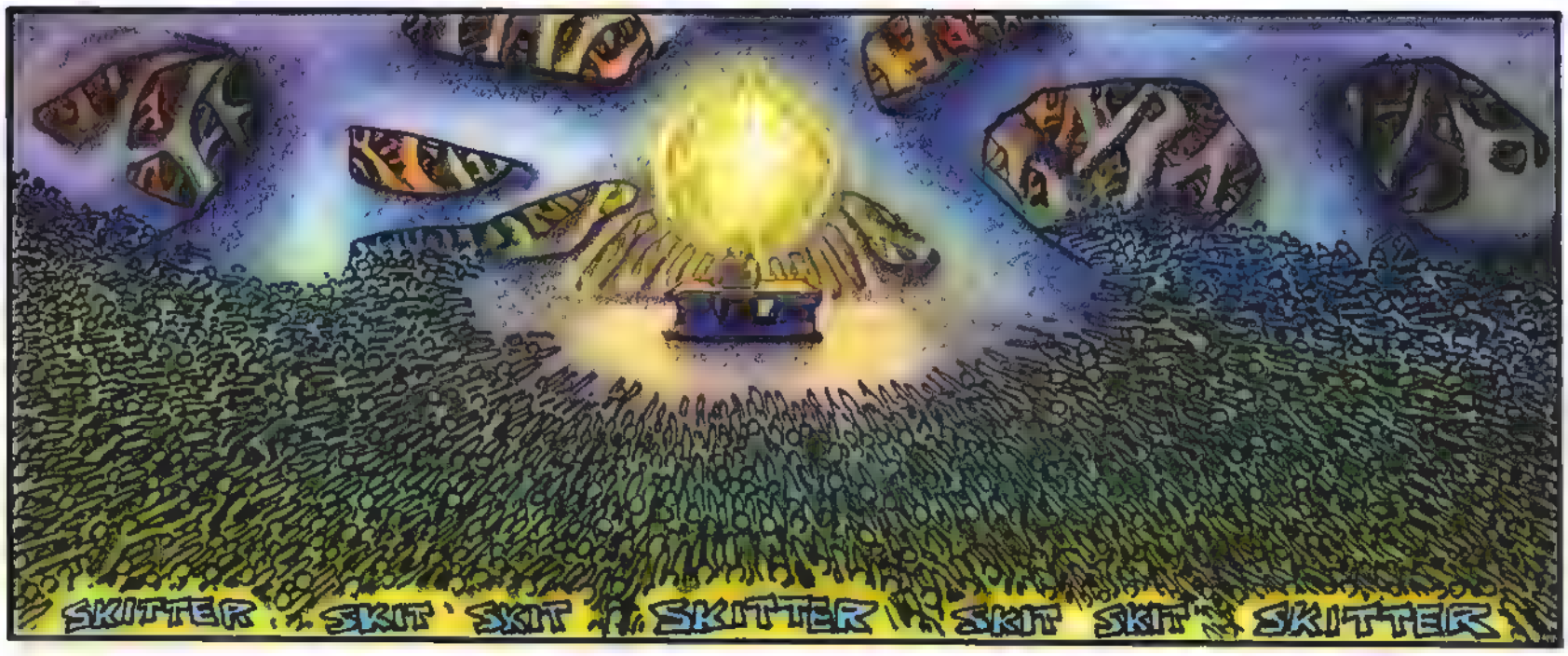
MUUTA.

MUUTA.

MUUTA.


NO! NO! NO! NO! NO! NO!
YAAAAAAAG!

AAUUGH!
OOOAAGH!
UUURRNNN!
AAAWWWW!


SKITTER SKIT SKIT SKITTER SKIT SKIT SKITTER

GET OUT! GET OUT! ALL OF YOU, GET OUT!

COME, SWEET OBLIVION.

DEATH! DEATH! DIE, YOU BASTARD!

WHAT'S THE MATTER? I CAN'T DO IT. I FEEL PARALYZED THE MOMENT THE POINT TOUCHES. SOME DEMON SPIRIT IS SAVING ME FOR YET FURTHER DEGRADATION AND TORTURE.

MUUTA.

MUUTA IS NOT DEAD. ONE OF THESE HIDEOUS MONSTERS DIED. NOT MUUTA. SHE IS BACK THERE...ON MUUTARON.

I'LL GET YOU, MUUTA.

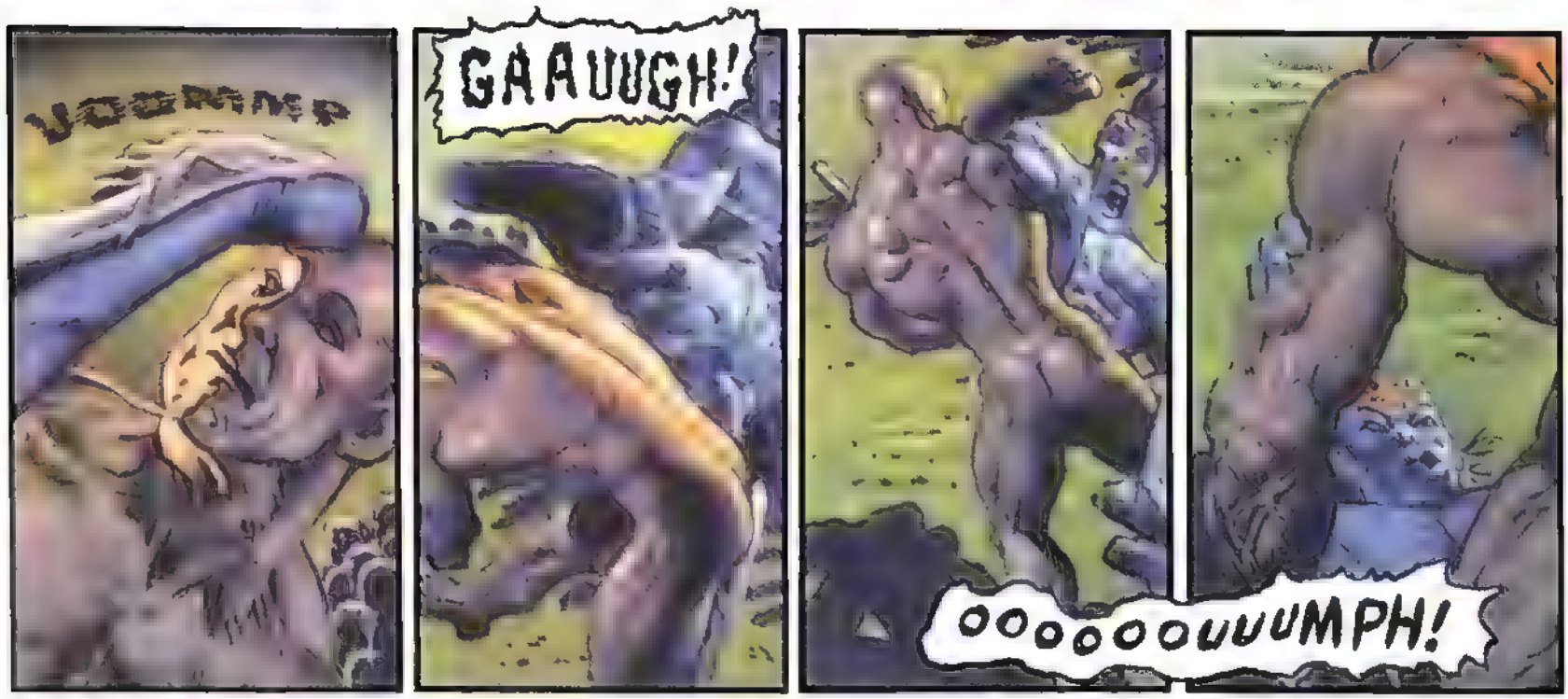
I'LL ALLOW NOTHING TO STAND IN MY WAY...

...NOTHING IN THIS WORLD.

I'LL REACH TO THE FARTHEST CORNERS OF NEVERWHERE TO GET YOU.

THOK
EEEYAAAUGH!

HOO!
WHIP


GAAUUGH!
OOOOOOUUUMPH!

WHUD

AAAAGH!

BOMP

KRAK

GAAAAAAAUK!

DEN!

DEN!

ZANDOR SURRENDERS.

DEN!

DEN!

YAAAAAAY!

WELL FOUGHT, MASTER.

NOT TOO WELL. YOU REALLY CAUGHT ME NAPPING WITH THAT FLYING SPIN.

COME JOIN ME FOR SOME REFRESHMENT.

UHM! I'M AFRAID I'LL HAVE A PERMANENT IMPRESSION OF YOUR KNEE IN MY BELLY.

HA, HA, HA!

IN ANY CASE, MY WIN IS A HIGH TRIBUTE TO YOUR TUITION, MASTER.

YOU ALREADY WERE QUITE SKILLED WHEN WE FOUND YOU, DEN. AND YOU PRACTICALLY TAUGHT YOURSELF, ESPECIALLY AFTER OUR MEDITATIONS.

YES, ZANDOR. MY LIFE WAS A GRAY NIGHTMARE UNTIL YOU HELPED ME FIND MY WAY. I AM FOREVER IN YOUR DEBT.

NONSENSE. I--

PARDON ME, SIR.

THERE IS A STRANGER IN CAMP WHO CLAIMS TO KNOW DEN.

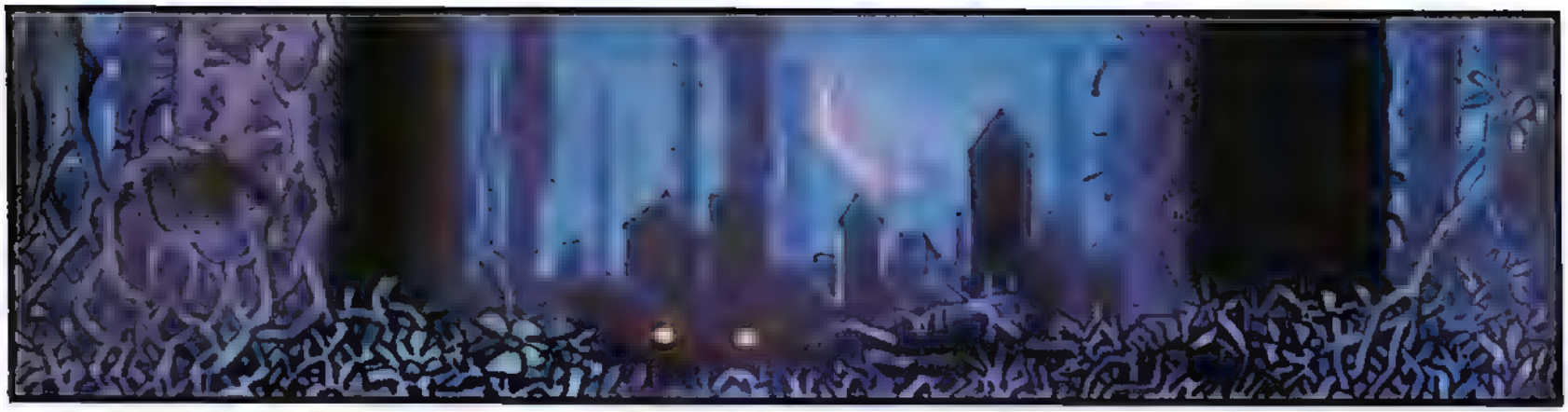
DEN! DEN!

DEN, IT'S ME, DORT. I WAS LORD ZEG'S CAPTAIN.

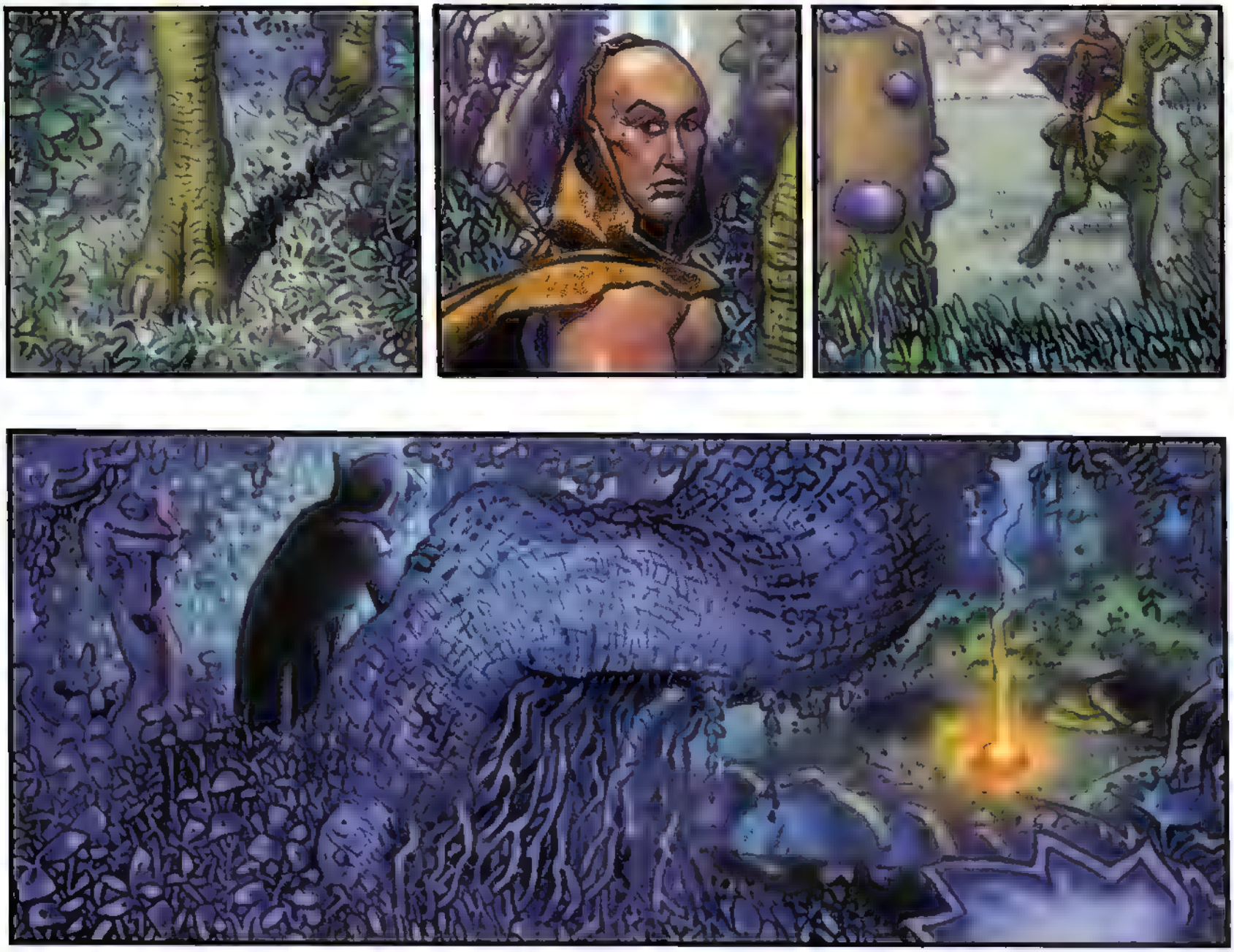
DORT!

PLEASE JOIN US, DORT.

I FEAR I BRING YOU BAD NEWS, DEN. ZEG IS DEAD. SIX OF HIS FAMILY ARE MISSING AND ZEGIUM BURNED. WE SURVIVORS BELIEVE SCON KILLED THE OLD MASTER. YOUNG TARN RAN AWAY INTO MUVOVUM AND STILL HASN'T BEEN FOUND.



OH FATHER, HOW COULD YOU LET HIM GO? :SOB:
DEN HAS DECIDED TO SEARCH FOR HIS FRIEND TARN, THEN FIND WHO MURDERED ZEG. ZEG WAS LIKE HIS FATHER, TARN LIKE HIS BROTHER. DORT WILL REMAIN AWHILE TO RECOVER FROM HIS LONG JOURNEY.
CALM YOURSELF, WYN. THERE IS NOTHING WE CAN DO.



AARIEE!

NO, NO!

THIP

GAAAA!

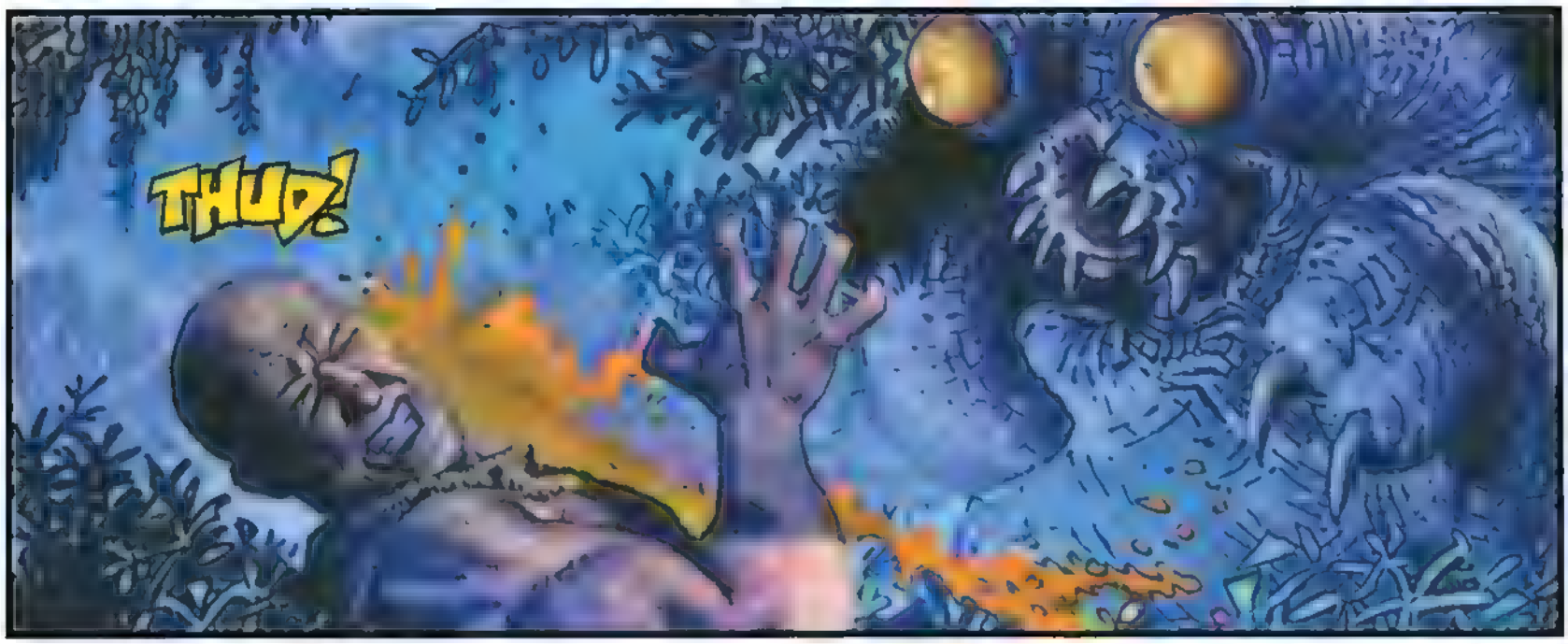
THBLDK

KRASH

VVVVOOOOOMMMMM

WYN, GET BACK!

UNG!


THUD!

SKLUTCH!
SKRRRRT!

THRASH
BRUDGH
KRAKLE

DEN!

KATH--
WYN.

YOU SAVED MY LIFE.

AND YOU SAVED MINE.

HA, HA, HA, HA, HA, HA, HA, HA, HA.

HA, HA, HA, HA, HA, HA, HA, HA, HA.

NO, WYN. YOU MUST RETURN TO YOUR PEOPLE NOW. I'M GLAD TO SEE YOU, BUT I MUST GO ON ALONE.

DON'T YOU LIKE ME, DEN? DIDN'T YOU LIKE OUR PLAY?

YES, I DID. BUT I'M NOT READY TO LIVE WITH A WOMAN AGAIN. I HAVE A BURDEN PRESSING ON MY MIND. I MUST DISPEL IT.

VERY WELL. DON'T EXPECT ME TO WAIT AROUND, THOUGH. THERE ARE MANY MEN OF THE LORUNGA WHO DESPERATELY WANT WHAT I GAVE YOU.

WYN--

KREK

HEY, WHAT'S THE MATTER, BORIS?

C'MON, I WANT TO GO THIS WAY. *EH?* WHAT'S THAT?

THAT NOISE...A STRANGE, FARAWAY HISSING.

OH MY GOD! WHAT IS IT...? NO! DRAMITES! THERE MUST BE MILLIONS OF THEM COMING OUT OF MUVOVUM.

OKAY, BORIS, WE WON'T GO THAT WAY. WE'LL HEAD NORTH HERE.

TARN WAS LAST SEEN IN MUVOVUM. COULD HE HAVE ESCAPED THAT HORDE?

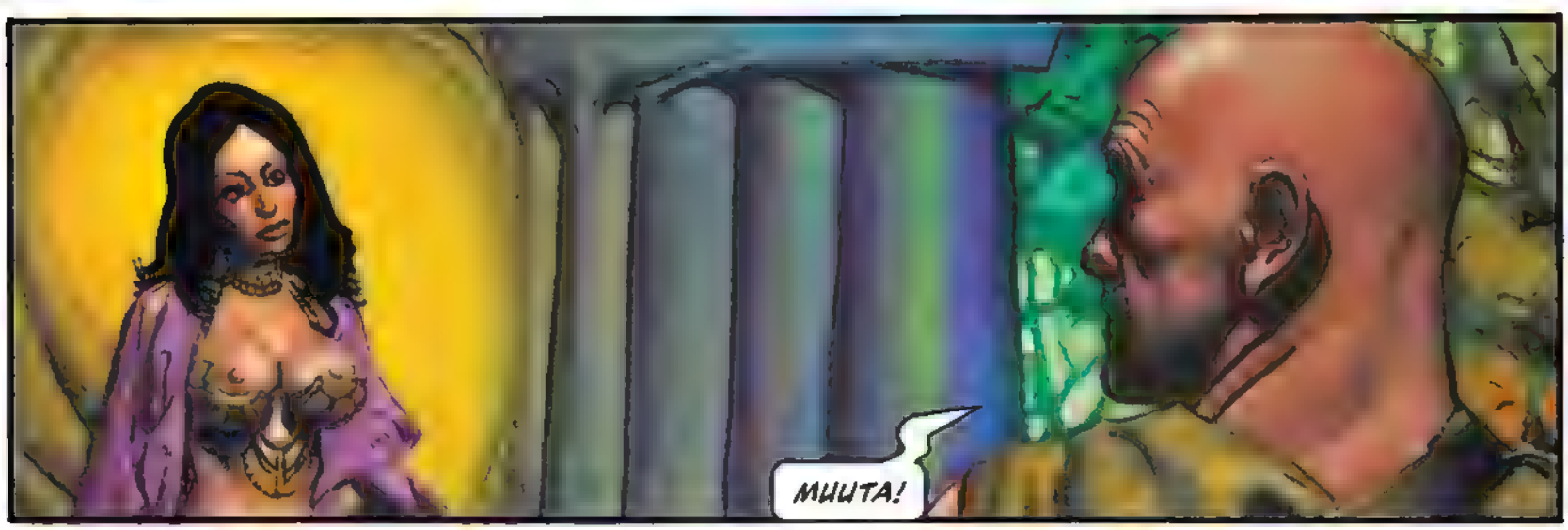
THREE DAYS WITH NO TRACE OF LIFE IN THOSE CREATURES' WAKE.

THERE, A DRAMITE HIVE OF COLOSSAL SIZE!

IT SEEMS ABANDONED.

DON'T STRAY TOO FAR, BORIS. I'M GOING TO CHECK THIS OUT.

KLAK
TCHAK


MUUTA!

DEN, AT LAST. YOU KNOW I'VE REALLY GONE TO A LOT OF TROUBLE TO FIND YOU.

HOW DID YOU KNOW I HAD RETURNED AND THAT I WOULD BE HERE?

I OCCASIONALLY BUY CLOTH FABRICS AND JEWELRY FROM THE LORUNGA. ZEG'S GUARD, DORT, WAS THERE AND TOLD ME.

I BEAT YOU HERE ON MY AIRSHIP. I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR TWO DAYS NOW.

BUT WHY?

I KNOW YOU'RE SEARCHING FOR TARN. I WILL HELP YOU. AFTER ALL, HE WAS ONCE MY BETROTHED.

THOUGH I DON'T LOVE HIM, I COULDN'T BEAR THE THOUGHT OF HIM DESTROYING HIMSELF ON ACCOUNT OF ME.

I BELIEVE HE WILL HEAD FOR MY ESTATE MUUTARON.

WE CAN TRAVEL TOGETHER ON MY AIRSHIP.

NO, THE SHIP IS TOO CRAMPED FOR SLEEPING. WE'LL CAMP ON THE GROUND AND START IN THE MORNING.

DEN.

KATH.

DEN, I'M LONESOME. I NEED YOU.

MUUTA.

I THINK YOU NEED ME TOO. CLOSE YOUR EYES AND I'LL BE KATH FOR YOU...FOR NOW.

UUUUHHMMM.

MAUB!

HEY, MAUB!

MAUB, I HEAR NOISES. CAN YOU HEAR THEM?

WHAT CAN IT BE?

MAUB, WHA--?

WHAT'S THE MATTER?

HURRY. WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!

I CAN SEE IT'S GOING TO BE A REAL CHORE BREAKING YOU OF GIVING ORDERS AROUND ME.

CHIT CHIT CHITTER ...SSSS

AAAAAAGGGHHH!

BANG BANG

DRAMITES!

DRAMITES!

BOARD THE SHIP!

BAM BAM BDIM

TOO LATE! THEY'VE OVERRUN IT ALREADY.

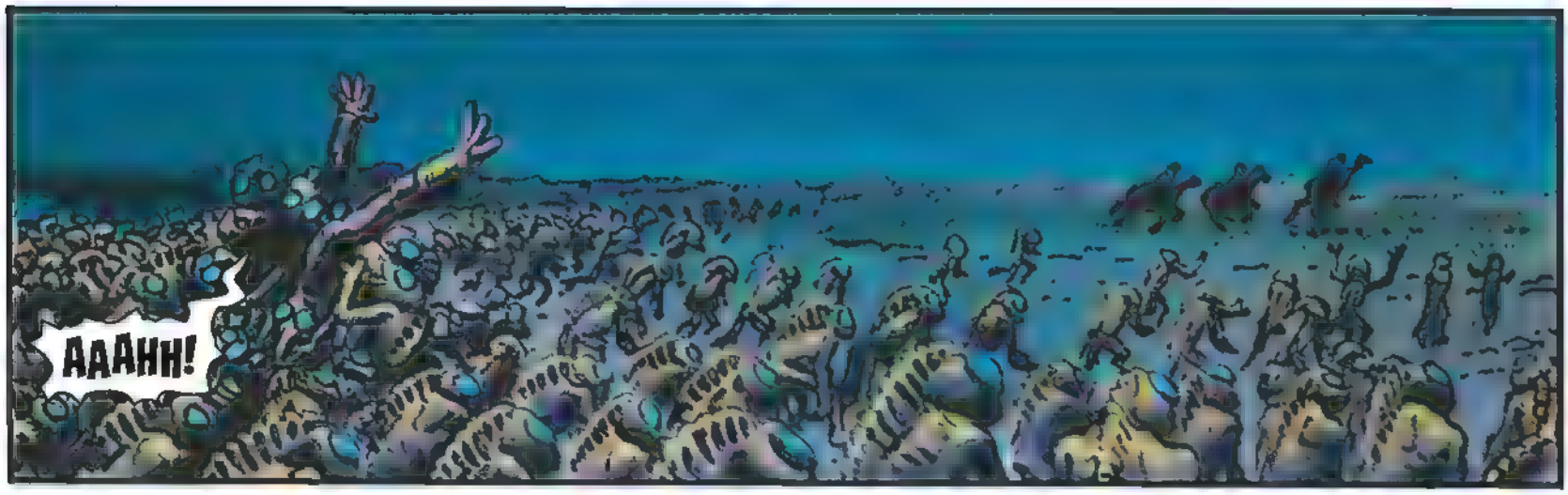
HSSSSSSS

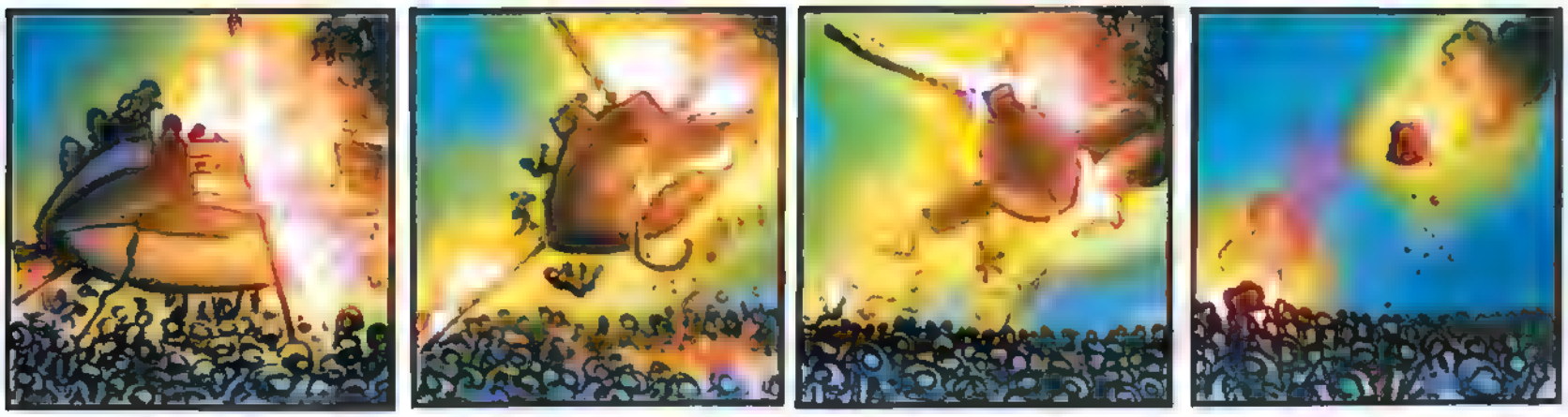
SSCROOOUROOUGH!

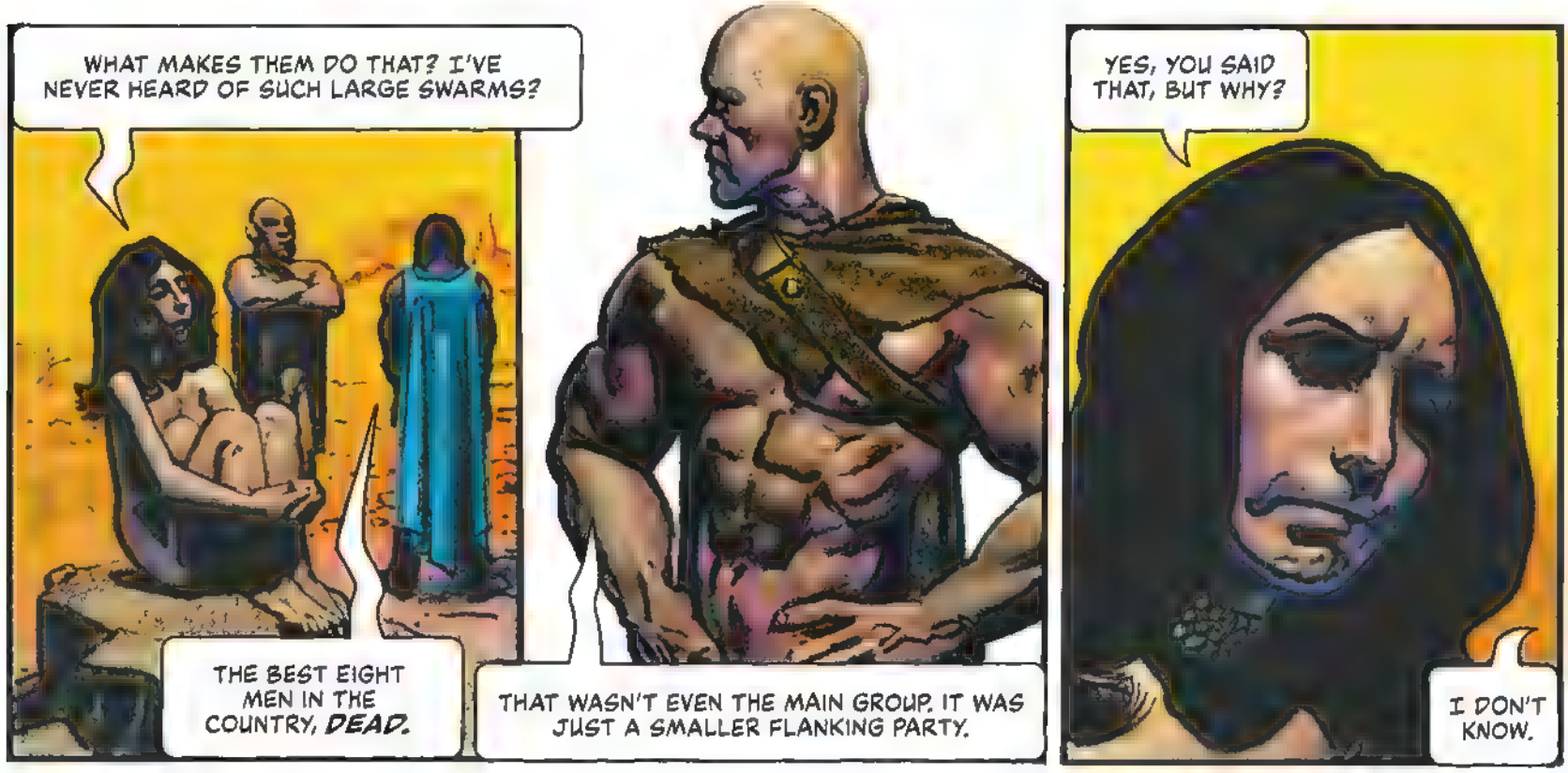
AAUUGH!

SWATCH

THIS WAY! THERE ARE FEWER THIS WAY!


AAAHH!



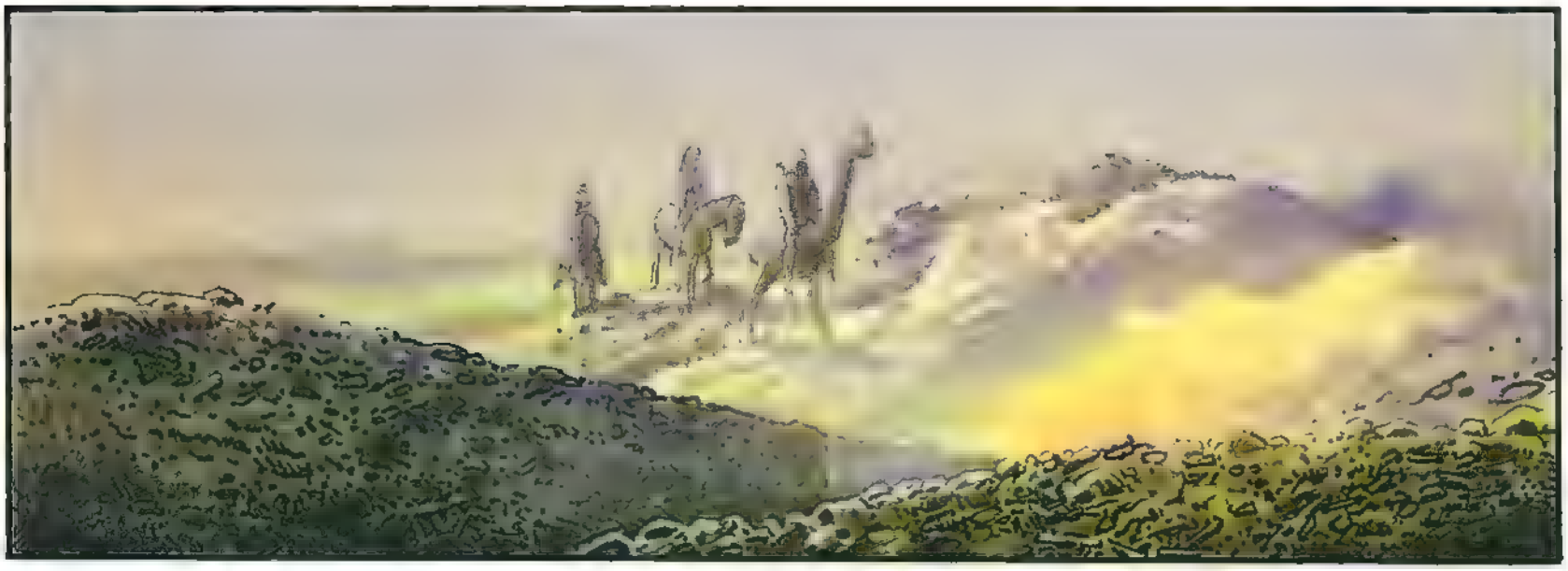

WHAT MAKES THEM DO THAT? I'VE NEVER HEARD OF SUCH LARGE SWARMS?
THE BEST EIGHT MEN IN THE COUNTRY, DEAD.
THAT WASN'T EVEN THE MAIN GROUP. IT WAS JUST A SMALLER FLANKING PARTY.
YES, YOU SAID THAT, BUT WHY?
I DON'T KNOW.

WE'D BEST KEEP MOVING. RIGHT NOW WE'RE BETWEEN THE MAIN MASS AND THEIR REAR GUARD. THEY'RE TRAVELING NORTHEAST TOWARD MUUTARON.

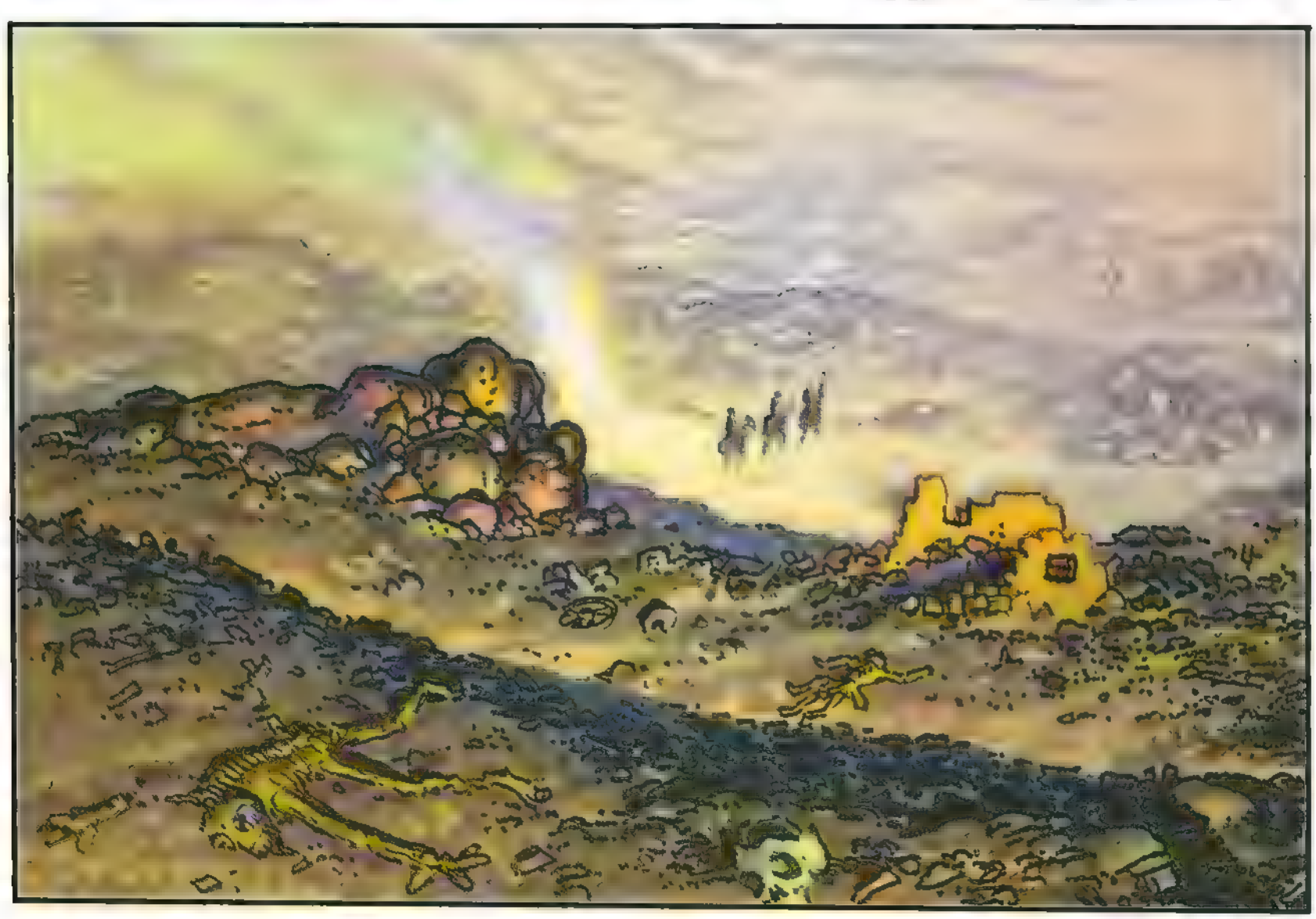
THEN WE GO NORTH... TO MINIMUUT.

WHAT IF MINIMUUT IS IN THEIR PATH ALSO?

THE DRAMITES WON'T BOTHER MINIMUUT. IT IS ON AN ISLAND IN LAKE MEEK.



IT SEEMS MORE DESOLATE AND STRIPPED THE FARTHER WE GO.
THE DRAMITES PASSED THE OASIS SEVERAL DAYS AHEAD OF US. THE LAND THERE BEGAN TO RECOVER. NOW WE ARE CLOSER TO THEM. THE RESULT OF THEIR FEEDING IS FRESH.



HOW MUCH FURTHER?

WE SHOULD SIGHT THE LAKE WHEN WE REACH THAT RIDGE.

I HOPE SO. LOOK BEHIND US.

OH GOD, THEY'RE GAINING.

WE'VE CAUGHT UP WITH THE MAIN GROUP.

HURRY! BACK OUT OF SIGHT.

THEY'RE MOVING ON. IF WE CAN WAIT LONG ENOUGH, THE BOAT IS STILL AFLOAT.

BUT NOT FOR LONG. THOSE DEVILS BEHIND ARE CLOSING WITH EVERY MOMENT. WE'LL HAVE TO MAKE A RUN FOR IT.

C'MON, LET'S GO!

NO. JUST A FEW MOMENTS MORE.

HAAAUGH!

WAIT, YOU FOOL!

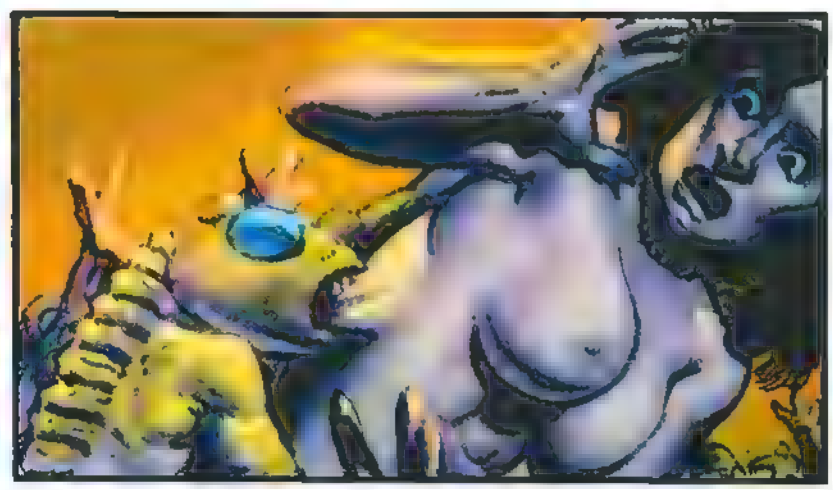
STAY BEHIND THOSE HILLOCKS.

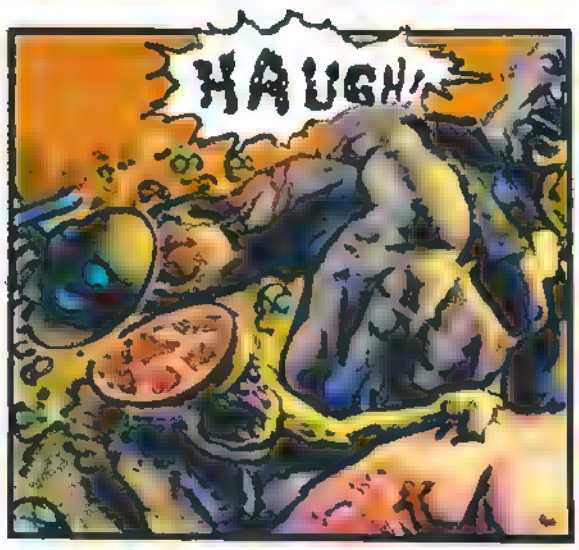
CHITTER?

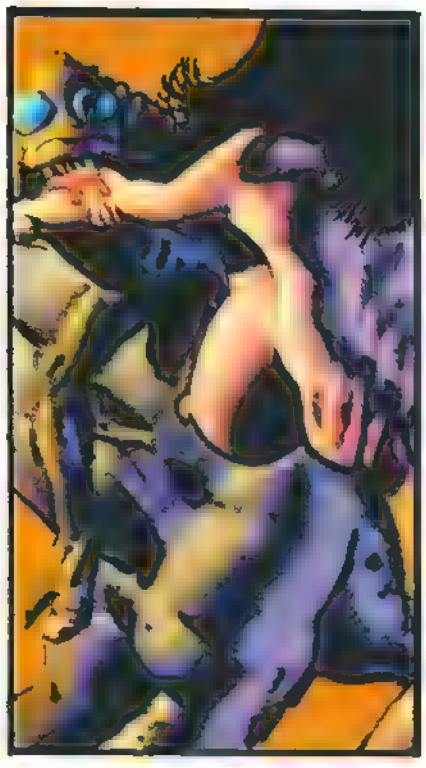
SKREEEEEEEEEEE

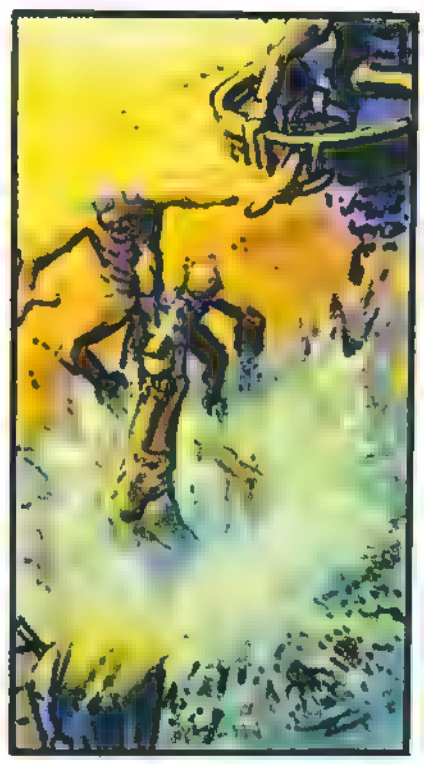
YYAAAAAAAUUUGH!

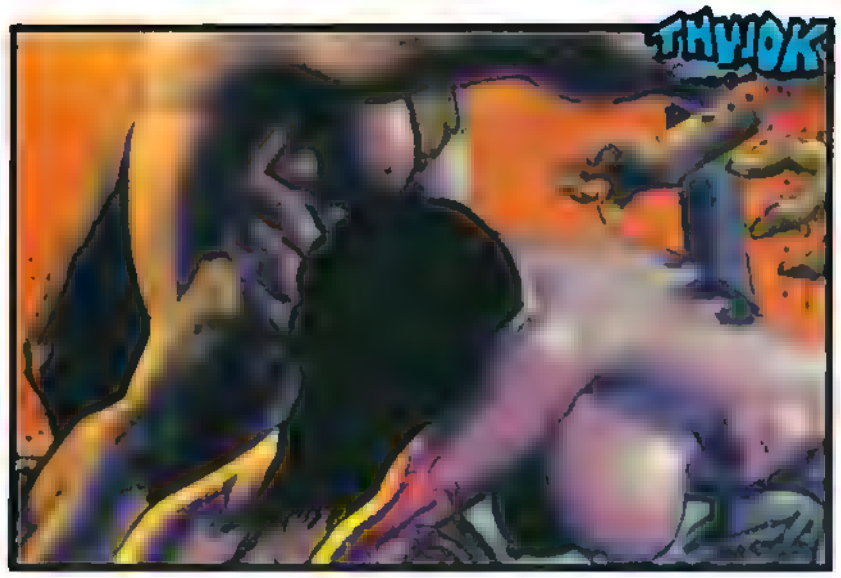
NOW WE GO!

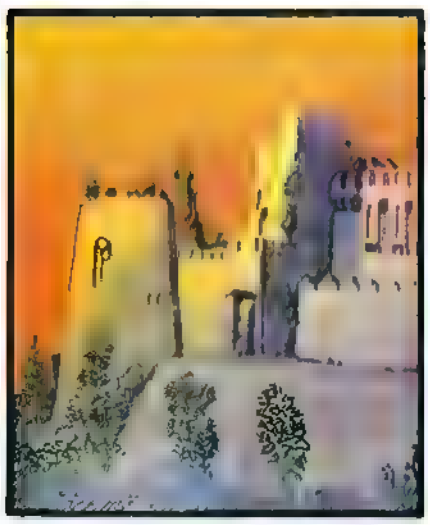


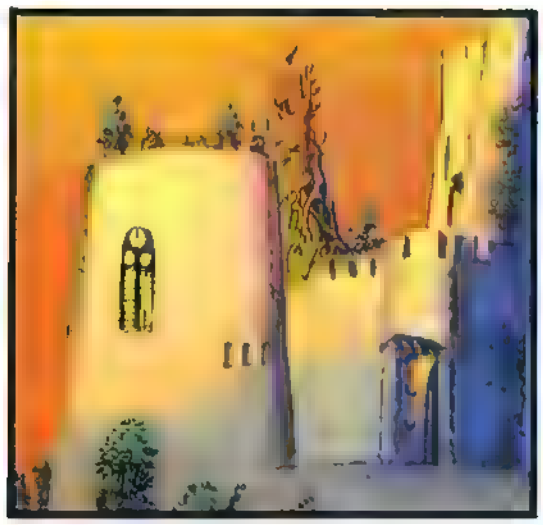

HAUGH!

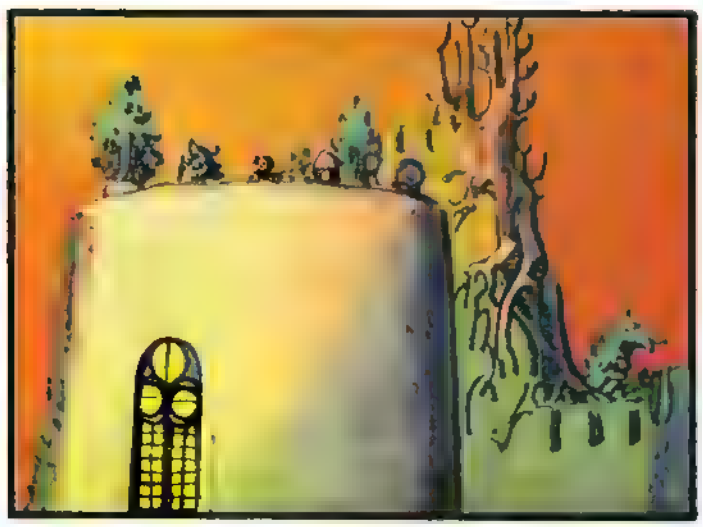





THVIOK







THERE'S BEEN NO SIGN OF THEM FOR A WEEK NOW. ARE THEY GONE FOR GOOD?

I HOPE SO. WE ARE FORTUNATE THE PRIMITIVE CREATURES CAN'T SWIM.
AND WHAT OF YOUR PEOPLE IN MUUTARON? A MERE HUNDRED OR SO AGAINST THOSE MILLIONS! THEY'RE DOOMED.

MY LADY, A BOAT HAS BEEN SIGHTED COMING FROM THE NORTH.

SHE BEARS YOUR INSIGNIA...FROM MUUTARON.

SO MUCH FOR YOUR PROPHECY OF DOOM, DEN. THEY'LL BRING NEWS OF THE DRAMITES' DESTRUCTION.

MISTRESS MUUTA, A SPOKESMAN FROM THE BOAT APPROACHES.

WHAT'S THE MATTER? SPEAK, MAN!

HE'S MUTE. PERHAPS THIS EXPLAINS IT.

"GREETINGS, MUUTA. I WAS A GOOD MAN OF NOBLE BLOOD AND YOU REJECTED ME. MUCH HAS HAPPENED SINCE THEN AND I NOW COME TO YOU AS A KING. MY SOLDIERS HAVE TAKEN MUUTARON AND ARE NOW HOLDING YOUR SUBJECTS THERE FOR MY PLEASURE. I WOULD SPEAK WITH YOU. TO DENY ME NOW IS TO BRING DESTRUCTION TO ALL YOUR PEOPLE. YOUR HUMBLE, LOVING SERVANT, TARN."

A DRAMITE!

DON'T TOUCH HIM!

...TARN?

AH, MY LOVELY MUUTA.

I'VE WAITED SO LONG. GONE THROUGH SO MUCH.

I LOVE YOU, MUUTA. YOU ARE MINE.

YOU SEEM TO FORGET YOURSELF, TARN. I RULE HERE. I BELONG TO NO ONE. WHY HAVE YOU COME? WHAT DO YOU WANT?

OH, I AM SORRY. NOW THAT I HAVE ABSOLUTE POWER, I SOMETIMES FORGET THAT PEOPLE DON'T UNDERSTAND.

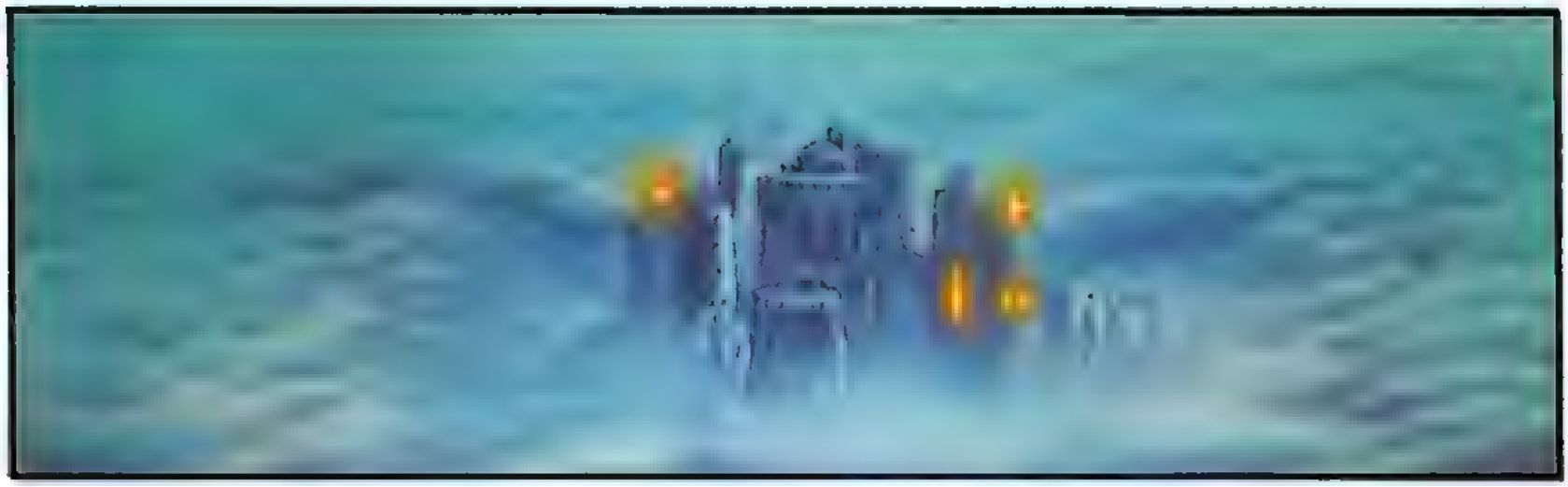
I AM HERE TO MAKE YOU MY FRIENDS. I AM A KING NOW. MY DOMAIN REACHES FROM THE LORUNGAN MOUNTAINS THROUGH THE KNORLAND FORESTS.

MY CAPITAL IS... MUUTARON.

WELL, I AM TIRED NOW. I HOPE YOU'LL ALLOW ME SOME ROOMS FOR MY ENTOURAGE TO REST. WE CAN CONTINUE OUR INTERVIEW TOMORROW.

TARN! DON'T YOU RECOGNIZE ME? I'M DEN, YOUR COMRADE. YOU SAVED MY LIFE ONCE.

WHAT A SURPRISE, FINDING YOU HERE, DEN...WITH MY BELOVED MUUTA.



I HAVE A MIND TO THROW THAT SWOLLEN BUG LOVER INTO THE LAKE. IF IT WEREN'T FOR MY PEOPLE HELD HOSTAGE AT MUUTARON.

DON'T HATE ME, DEN. I DID NOTHING TO SPUR HIS INFATUATION.

EXCUSE ME, MISTRESS. THERE IS SOME ACTIVITY ON THE FAR SHORE.

WHAT IS IT?

DRAMITES! THEY'RE WORKING BY TORCH LIGHT. TARN MUST EXPLAIN THIS.

PLEASE EXCUSE ME. I'M NOT FEELING WELL.

TARN, THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF TORCHES ON THE SHORE. YOU MUST EXPLAIN WHAT YOUR...SUBJECTS ARE DOING. LET US IN IMMEDIATELY.

OOOOOOH...! IT IS NOTHING TO BE ALARMED ABOUT...*UUUNNH*...THEY ARE MERELY PERFORMING SOME RELIGIOUS RITES.

THEY WILL BE GONE BY MORNING. *OOOOOOOHHH!*

TARN, WHAT AILS YOU?

GET OUT OF MY WAY. I MUST SEE HIM!

THERE, SATISFIED? NOW GO AWAY AND LET ME ALONE.

WHAT IN HELL?
CLOSER! THE LIGHTS ARE COMING CLOSER.
MMFp--

OH, NO! MUUTA, WE MUST ESCAPE THE ISLAND AT ONCE. THEY ARE BUILDING A BRIDGE.

ASSEMBLE MY MEN AND SERVANTS. I'LL GET MY THINGS TOGETHER.

YOU ALERT THE MEN ON THE EAST SIDE. WE MUST TAKE THE SHIP AND ABANDON THE ISLAND.

EEEEAAGH!

BRAK!
VOOOOMMM
KRAK
TAK
HAUG!
WHAK!
THONK
THRUK!
SKRAK!

ZONK

WHUD

CRASH!

BY THE GODS!

SLAM

KLUNK

THE MEN ARE READY IN THE DOCK HOUSE.

WHERE'S MUUTA?

I DON'T KNOW, SIR.

GO AND TAKE THE SHIP WITH THE SOLDIERS. I'LL BRING HER.

DAMN!

MUUTA, TIME HAS RUN OUT. WE'VE GOT TO LEA--

DEN!

HE, HE, HE. YOU LOSE, DEN. SHE'S MINE.

I KNEW YOU WANTED HER FOR YOURSELF ALL ALONG.

MUUTA IS MY BRIDE. I'VE JUST MARRIED HER.

DON'T WORRY, I WON'T EAT YOU. I LOVE YOU AND I WANT THE SAME GOOD THINGS THAT HAPPENED TO ME TO HAPPEN TO YOU TOO.

BUT MUUTA AND I HAVE MUCH TO DO FIRST. WE'VE GOT TO HAVE A FAMILY...MAYBE A FEW HUNDRED THOUSAND.

I'M AFRAID THE OLD GENERATION IS ON ITS LAST LEGS. THEY'RE DROPPING LIKE FLIES. HEH, HEH, HEH! THEN WE CAN MAKE YOU A SUCCUBUS.

LET US GO!

SKREEEE

CAST OFF! RAISE THE SAIL!

HEY, WHAT ABOUT MISTRESS MUUTA?

IT'S TOO LATE FOR HER AND HER BOYFRIEND.

HEH, HEH, HEH! DID YOU HEAR THAT, DEN? THEY'RE LEAVING YOU BEHIND.

NO! NO!
IT'S SHAMEFUL TREASON, ISN'T IT...? UUUNNN... WELL, THEY WON'T ESCAPE. I FORESAW THIS POSSIBILITY. I LEFT ONE WORKER ABOARD HIDDEN WITH A SPECIAL CARGO. HE HAD ONLY ONE TASK TO DO IN THIS EVENT...

KA-BRUMP!

NOW AS YOU WATCH...I SHALL MATE WITH MY MUUTA.

NO, NO PLEASE NO!

AAAAGGH!

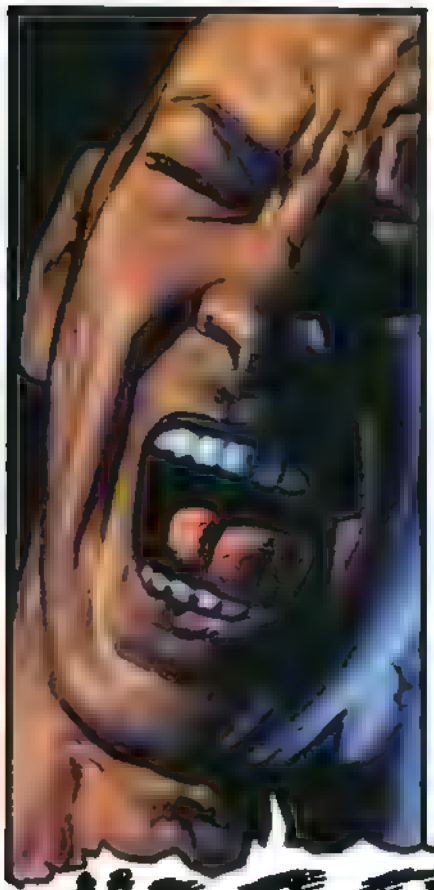
SKRIIIKKTCH

SSSKKRRIIIITTCCCHH!

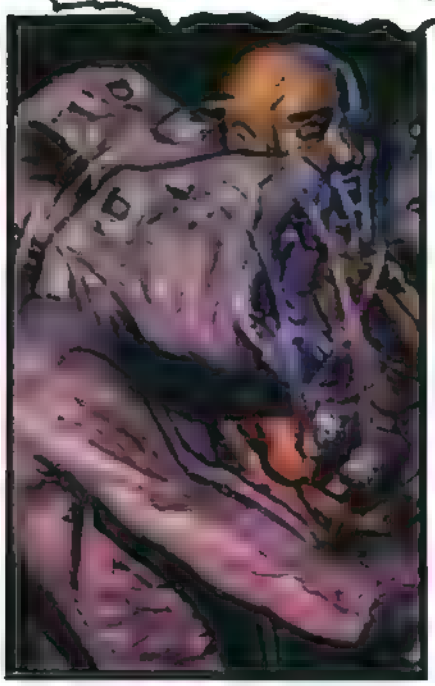
SLORK

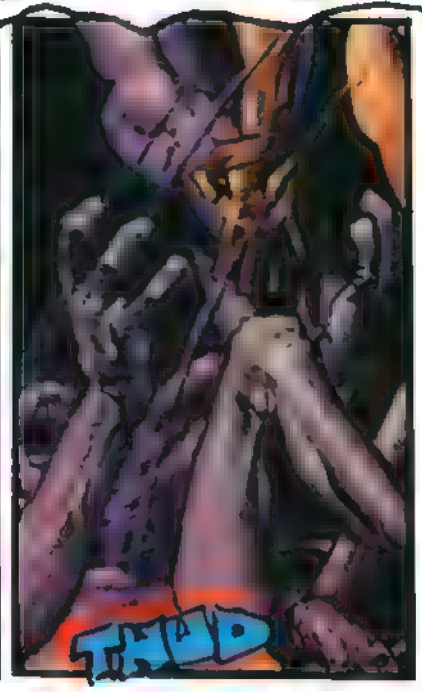
KRUNCH

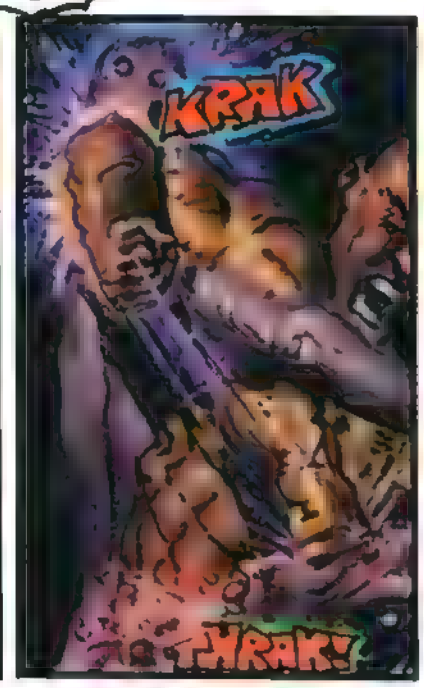
EEAAAHH!



YAAAAAAGH!







CRASH

EEEEEEEEUURROOUGH

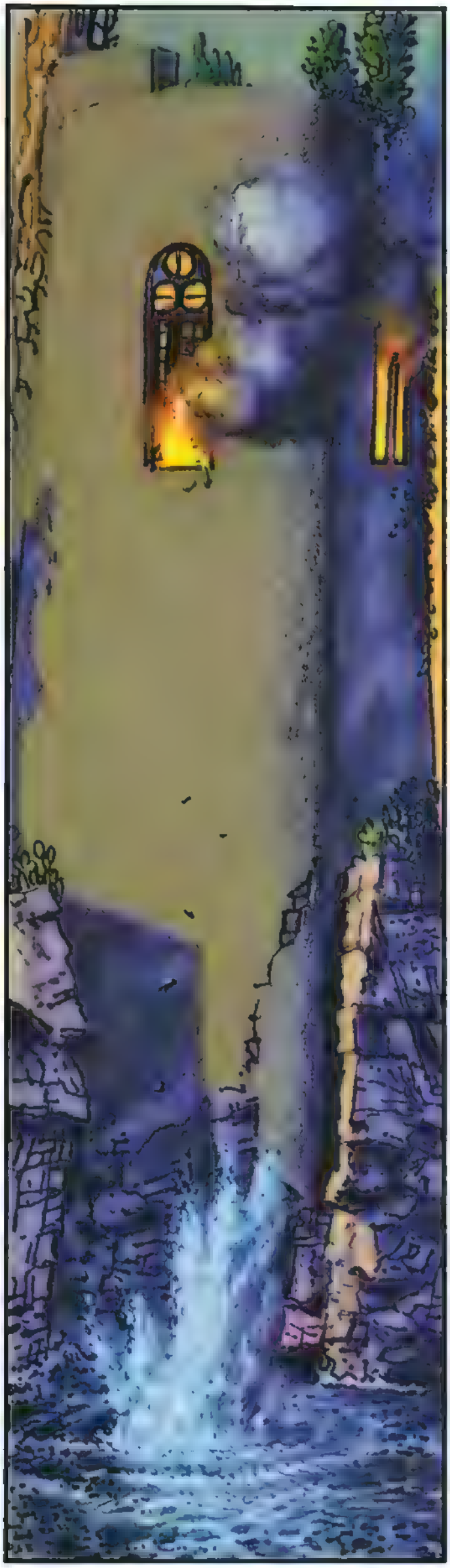
FROOMP

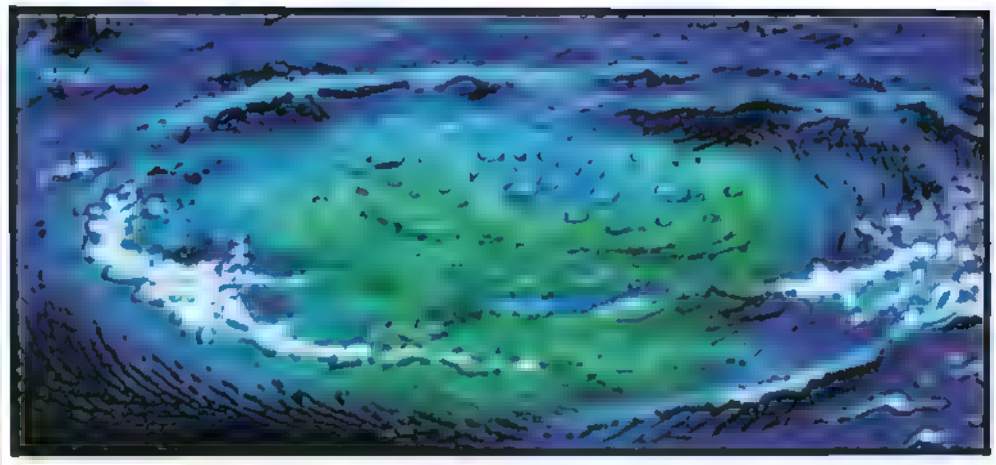
SSKKKRREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE...

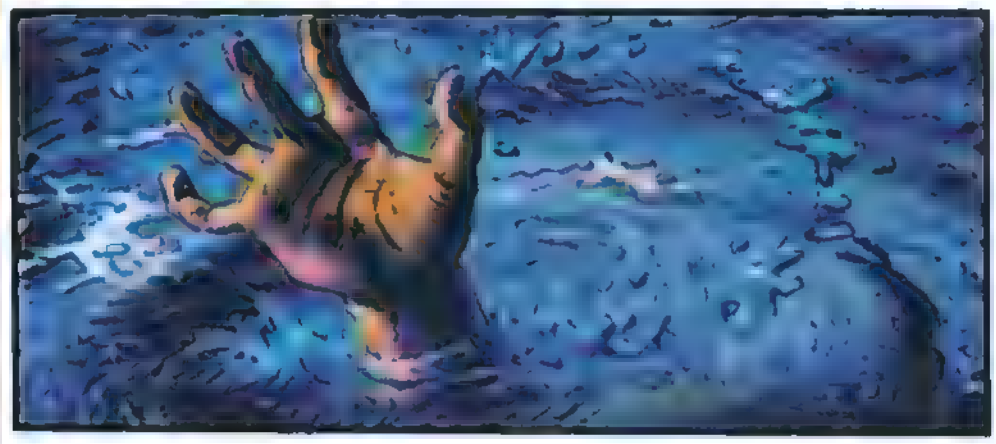
K-BLAK!

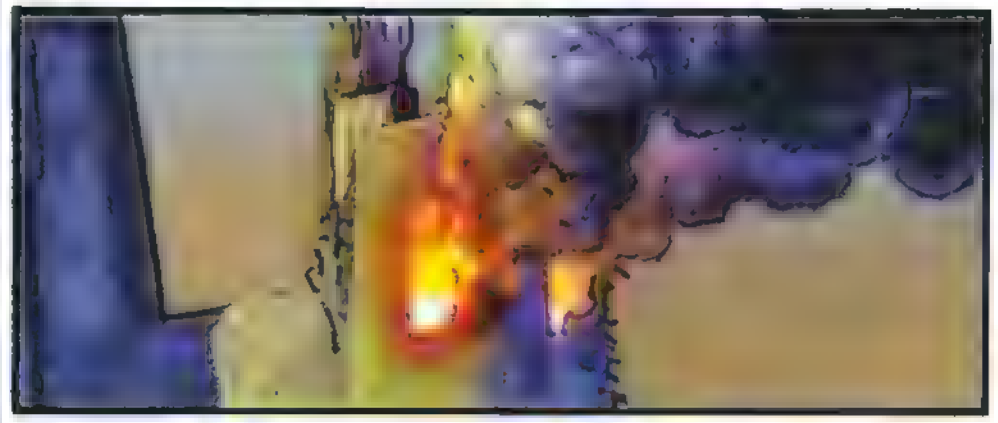
WHUD

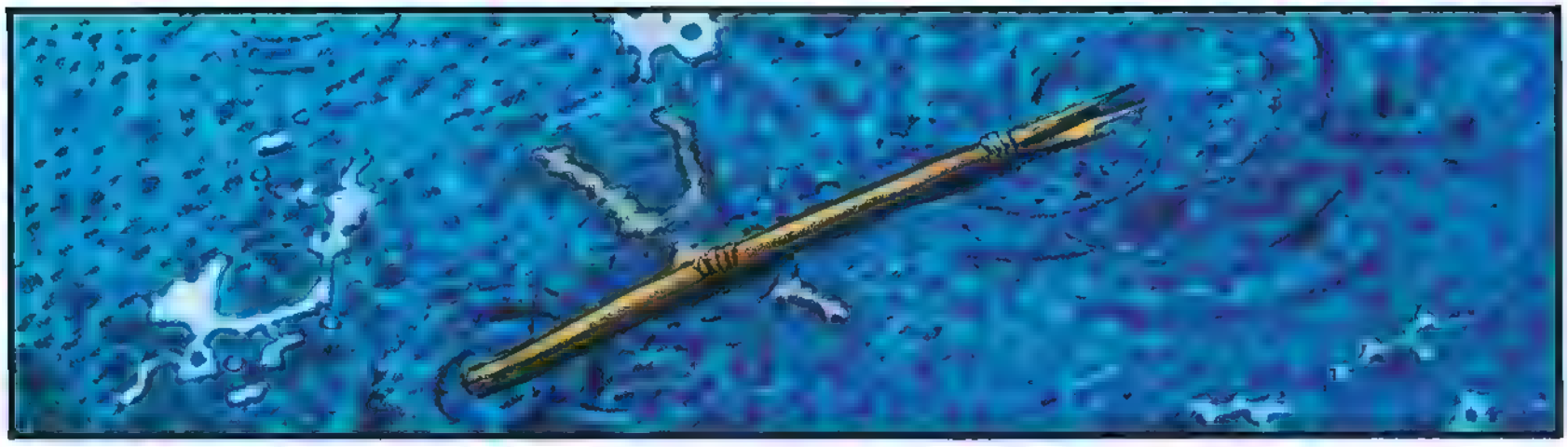
KRASH!

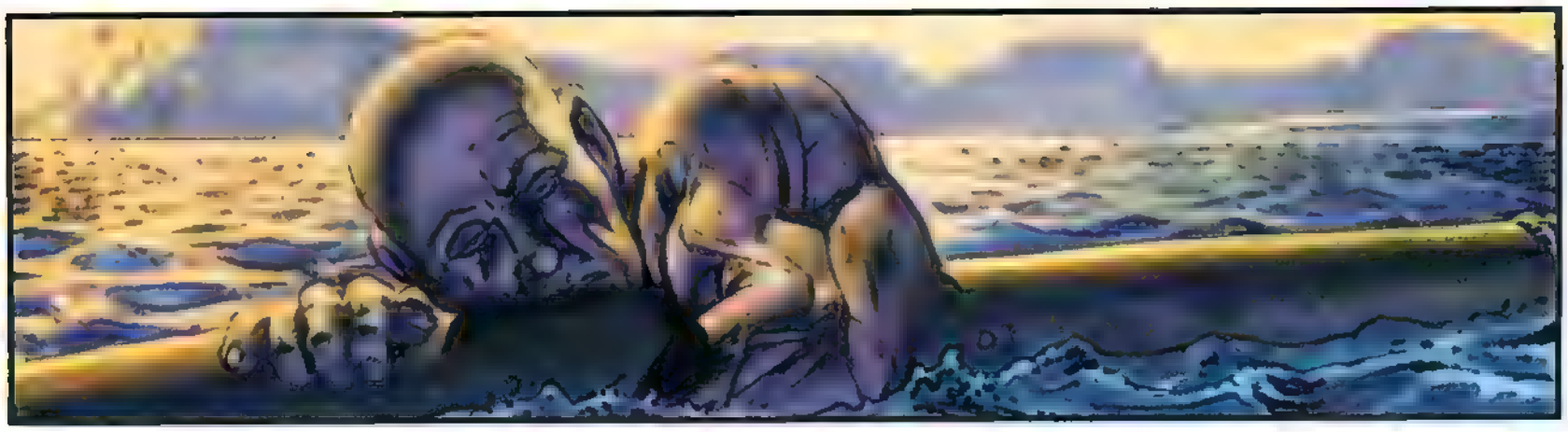


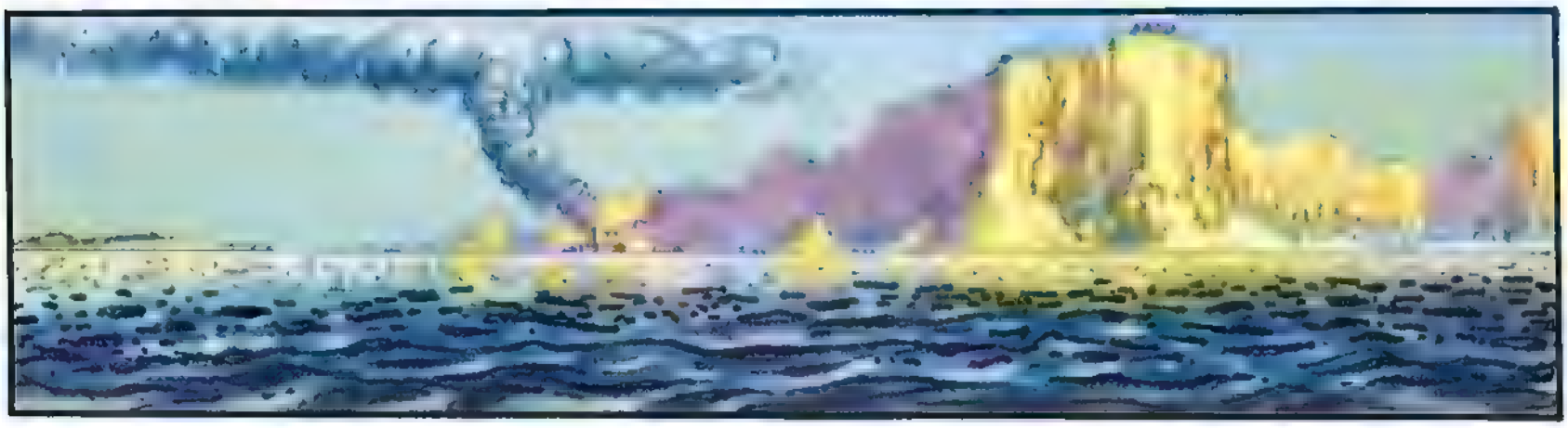


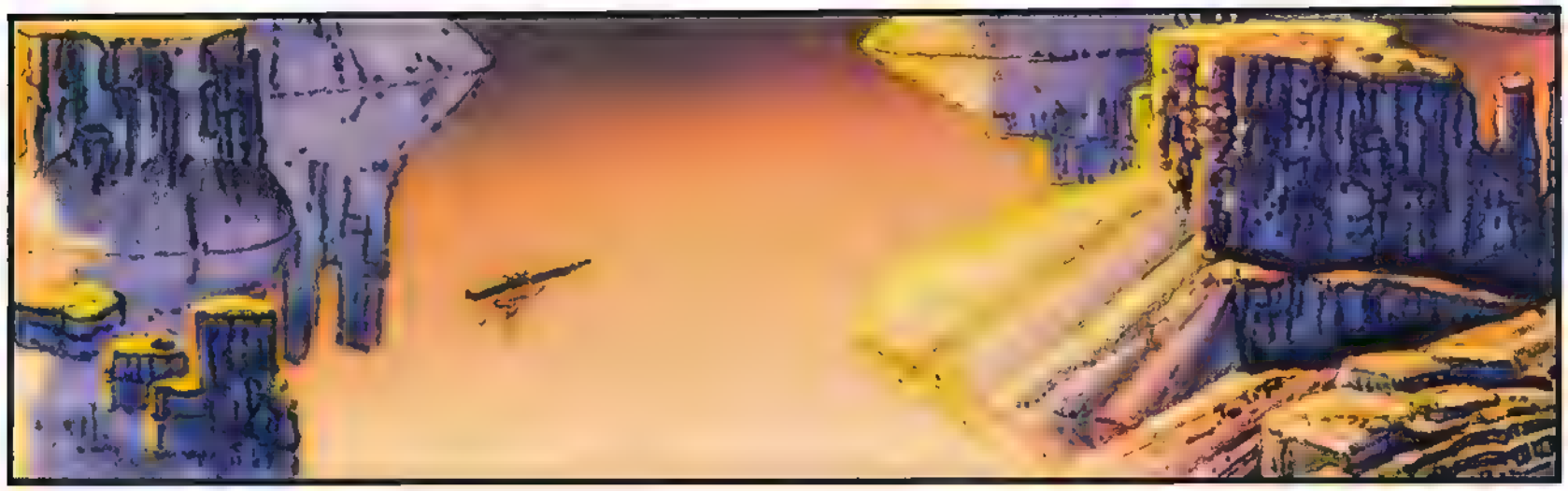




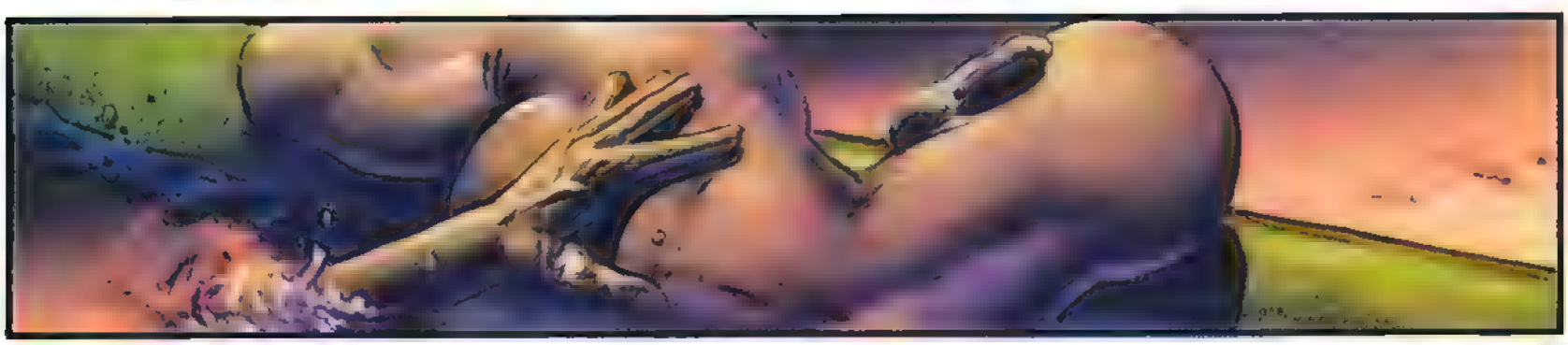


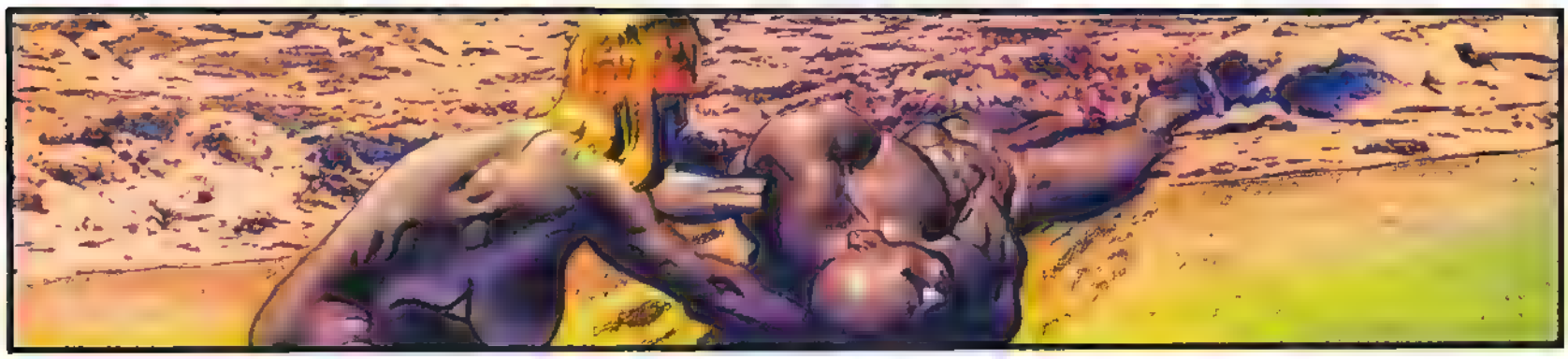


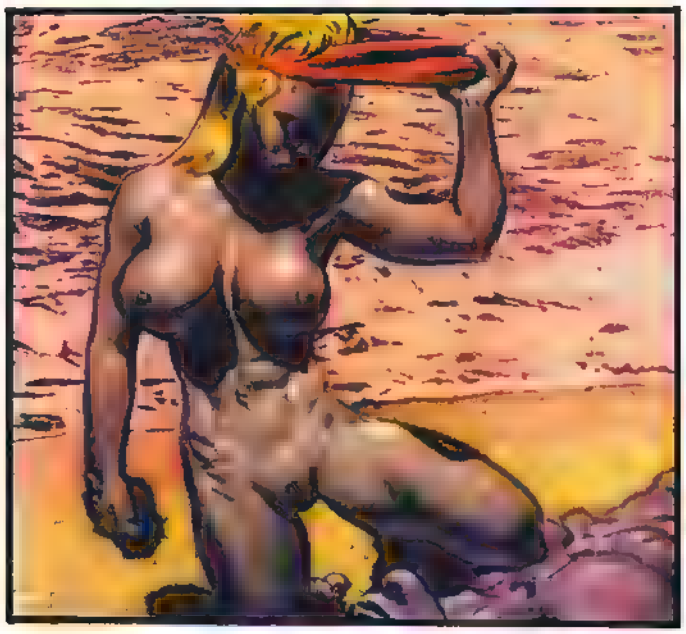


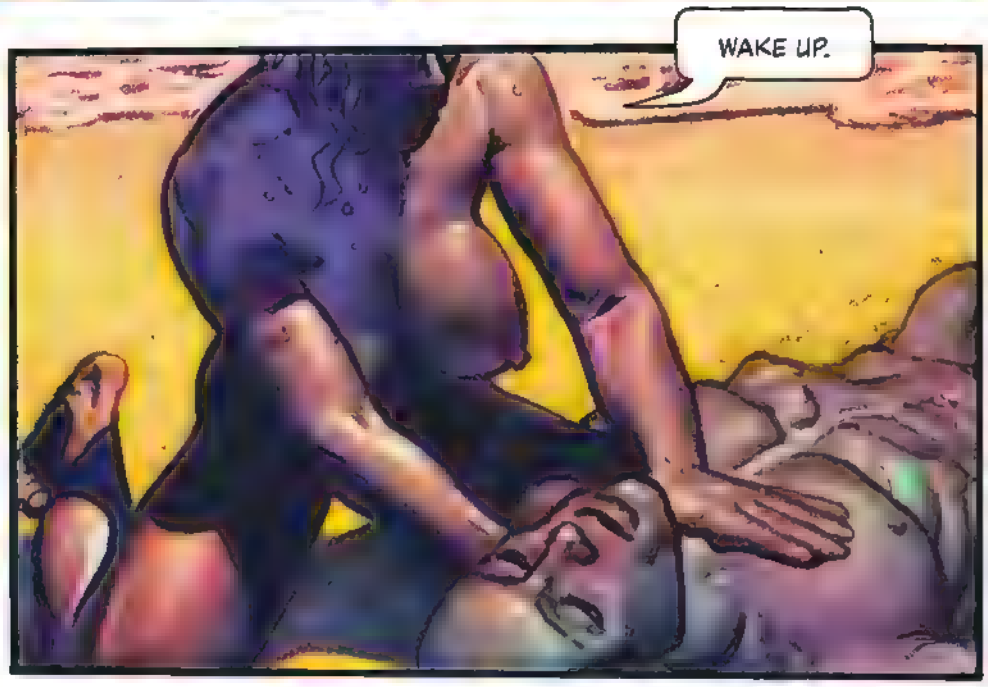


SPLISH








WAKE UP.

KATH? IT IS YOU. YOU'VE RETURNED!

THE DRAMITES...! WHERE?

THEY ARE ALL DEAD OR DYING FROM NO APPARENT CAUSE. I GUESS IT'S THE END OF THEIR LIFESPAN.

I KILLED THE MONSTER THAT KILLED TARN AND MUUTA.

I KILLED THEIR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

THE END

MUVOVUM EPILOGUE
THE METAMORPHOSIS OF TARN

JOSÉ VILLARRUBIA

In *The Metamorphosis*, Ovid depicts how the gods use mortals as their playthings and sometimes turn them into other beings or things as rewards or punishments. Similarly, the characters in Den frequently undergo significant changes, but without divine intervention. These transformations, like those in Ovid's myths, are often extreme, unexpected, and quite underserved. Mysteriously, immortality is granted to certain characters, while disfigurement or worse happens to other less lucky ones.

Den volume one, *Neverwhere*, recounted how two average men, Dan and David, had been turned into the same ideal champion, the herculean Den, inhabiting an idealized body. As Corben describes it: "(Den) was my universal hero in a fantastic world. He's unusual from most fantasy heroes because in the world he goes to, there are no clothes." In *Muvovum*, the second volume, Den remains the protagonist but the most remarkable evolution here is that of his friend Tarn, the meek grandson of the warlord Zeg. Like Den's alter egos, Dan and David, Tarn is introduced as average and skinny, which in Neverwhere makes him insecure. His crippling self-doubt is not unjustified in this fantasy land. In the opening pages, the woman he loves, Muuta, makes it clear that she's not interested in someone like him and would like instead to be with a stud like Den.

Tarn is not the first "normal" man to be rejected in this narrative. Both Dens already had been: Dan unsuccessfully asked his coworker Barb to go out on a date in the animated short film that is a prequel to the graphic novels. Likewise, in the first volume of this series, David acknowledged his previous lack of success with the women he considered beautiful. Corben describes Den as "Sort of a nerd-twerp on Earth, and when he goes to Neverwhere, he becomes the ultimate masculine muscle guy." As I mentioned in my preface to *Neverwhere*, by the 1970s, when the *Den* comics began being published, the idea that being very muscular made men extremely sexually desirable had been engrained into American culture for decades. As Kenneth R. Dutton wrote in his book *The Perfectible Body*: "For over 50 years, the Charles Atlas magazine advertisements held out to the world's adolescents the prospect of becoming sexually potent 'he-men' by following his bodybuilding courses."

The adventure really gets going when Den and Muuta leave the floating island where they live, and a jealous Tarn follows them. He soon gets lost, and his bizarre journey takes up about half of the pages of *Muvovum*. Tarn will suffer a transformation as unintentional as that of Dan and David, but much more brutal. Despite this, you would not know what's in store when you start the book since its tone is at first comedic, almost like a sitcom, with Den and Kath bickering like a long-married couple and Tarn and Muuta arguing as well. Right away, Den is spurned by Kath, who, after four years, is tired of frolicking in this adult Neverland and has chosen to return to her presumably dull existence on Earth. In *Neverwhere*, Den was in a love triangle with blonde doppelgangers Kath and the Red Queen —the two return here but with minimal roles. In *Muvovum*, Den finds himself in a new love triangle between Muuta and Tarn. Reversing the formula of two women pursuing the same man, two men are now rivals for the same woman. In addition, Den meets and mates with an alien female, Wyn, who has distinctly blue skin, large eyes, and a pointed head. This sort of galactic interspecies mating is

a theme that Corben had been exploring since his earliest published comics in the serial "Monsters Rule," where stellar agent Al Jorcus, is rescued on an alien planet by Narla, whom he later has an affair with. And he will repeat this sort of pairing later on in *Jeremy Brood*. Corben's characters sometimes intermingle in unexpected ways.

The story's most extraordinary sequence is a great example of this—spanning six pages with minimal text (pages 44-49), it blends bold images of sexual desire with body horror in an unsettling admixture. Corben breaks these pages' panel structure, creating a hypnotic graphic passage. Tarn becomes the unwilling recipient of a bizarre reproductive process reminiscent of the movie *Alien*. The Dramites, like the Xenomorphs, take on different forms, including, in this case, a horrifying giant caterpillar named Jordella, who hypnotizes and impregnates human subjects.

The transformation that Tarn experiences is more Kafkaesque than mythological. While David was turned into a god, Tarn turned into a hideous monster. One more ironic twist is that Tarn's father and grandfather would actually be revealed to be human monsters capable of horrific cruelty. But that will take place in later chapters of the story. Corben draws and paints Tarn's transformation in an extremely powerful way, mixing his skill for caricature with his hyper-real three-dimensional rendering. The result is that seeing Tarn about to burst his stretched-out human skin is an image that stays with you long after you put the graphic novel down. The drama then rushes to its grotesque and brutal conclusion. In the outrageous climax, the creature growing inside of him, a giant phallus dentatus (similar to the Chestbuster in Alien), makes him explode. This shock ending is one of the most unforgettable and startling ever in comics (pages 92-5).

While *Neverwhere* was produced over the course of six years in two different size formats and for three publishers, *Muvovum* was made regularly and appeared in installments in the magazine Heavy Metal from September 1981 to March 1983. This makes the book much more conceptually cohesive than the first one, and the artwork remarkably consistent. Corben used his virtuoso art skills to bring this fable to life: he first worked on the pages in black and white, fully rendering them tonally with various tools, including graphite, airbrush, colored pencils, gouache, inks, markers, and collage. He then made his unique hand-made color separations to achieve extraordinary palettes on the printed pages.

And the results are simply dazzling. The hundred-and-one pages of this tale are a rollercoaster of three-dimensional hallucinatory images. There may have been other comics as well executed as this one, but none has been done better. All the trademarks of Corben are here: the dynamic layouts, the extraordinary anatomy of the over-the-top protagonists, the expressive acting and energetic hand-to-hand combats, the erotic scenes, the truly hideous monsters, and the exotic mise-en-scène, all wrapped in the most sumptuous color imaginable. It is a veritable feast for the eyes that often takes one's breath away. Corben puts so much more than most other artists do in their work that it deserves to be read over and over. The attentive reader will find new rewards every time.

Like the rest of The Corben Library, the original pages have been meticulously scanned for this edition, and the black and white artwork blended with the printed colors. The result is a stunning representation of *Muvovum*, which will serve as a testament to this significant work for future generations.

José Villarrubia
Baltimore, March 2023

RICHARD CORBEN:
LEGACY OF A SUBLIME VISITOR

DANA MARIE ANDRA

A life engaged in the consumption of pop culture is one that follows trails, from one mind-expanding discovery to another, whether it's in music, books, film, or television. One thing leads to the next and the next. The trail of breadcrumbs expands exponentially.

So it is with comics. It's almost impossible for me to write about Richard Corben without doing so from within the timeline of my own involvement in comics and comics fandom. Corben has been part of my comics reading and collecting life from nearly the beginning. I was introduced to fandom and fanzines just as Corben was making his presence known there, just in time to witness the blossoming of this uniquely amazing talent.

Before discovering comics, however, I fell in love with monsters and monster magazines, and, like me, Richard Corben was a monster kid. A monster kid who married another monster kid (Madona Marchant). I was, in fact, reading and collecting *Famous Monsters of Filmland* (*FM*) when Corben appeared in its pages, first in a two-part article that mentioned his early amateur film collaborations with Dona Corben in *FM* #34 and #35 (1965), the latter of which featured his first published illustration. And when his *London after Midnight* illo was published in *FM* #47 (November 1967), unsigned and uncredited. And when his photo (in Frankenstein makeup: the Corben Creature) was included on the "Fang Mail" page in *FM* #55 (May 1969). But none of that was enough to leave a lasting impression—not yet.

Monsters led me to comics, and my earliest purchases were titles like Kona and Dell's classic *Frankenstein* one-shot. I was drawn a bit closer to comics with the debut of the *Batman* television series in January 1966, and I started buying *Batman* and a few other DC titles. But it wasn't until November 1966, when a friend showed me a copy of *Amazing Spider-Man* #45, that I became a hardcore, lifelong comic book junkie. And junkie is the right word because I really couldn't get enough. New comics came out on Tuesday and Thursday back then, and I was one of those kids who would hover by the spinner rack, waiting for the newsdealer to cut the wire on the bundles of new comics. I literally cried one day when I was told to stay after class, because it meant a delay in pouncing upon the new comics. So yeah, I was hooked.

My addiction eventually led me to secondhand bookshops that sold back-issue comics. One such store was Loomis Books in South Miami where, in the autumn of 1969, I noticed and answered a bulletin board invitation to join a local comic book club.

This is where the trail leads to Richard Corben.

The club was being formed by Andy Warner, who assisted G. B. Love in the production and publication of *Rocket's Blast Comicollector* (*RBCC*) . . . a fanzine. I had never seen or even heard of fanzines before this, and seeing this fanzine (or adzine), full of ads for other fanzines, was genuinely life altering, as dramatic as that might sound. *RBCC* was the convergence of comics dealers and comics fandom in the days before comic shops and conventions were commonplace, and issue #66 had just come out when I attended my first meeting. I clearly remember holding it in my hands and turning its pages, and how it felt to be drawn through this wondrous portal to the extraordinary world of fan publishing.

Amazing Spider-Man #45 had only been a gateway drug to what would become an even greater addiction: fanzines. Comic book

creators were as distant and unknowable, it seemed, as television and movie actors. But fanzines were made by people like me, who were creating their own content, some of whom had even managed to connect with those distant creators.

RBCC was the ideal "first fanzine," because it was *the* place for buying and selling back-issue comics and connecting with other fans. It was also a fertile showcase for up-and-coming fan artists, some of the best being Robert Kline, Don Newton, John Fantucchio, and Bob Juanillo, all of whom contributed covers and interior illustrations. An artist who stood out from the others, however, was Richard Corben. His work was like nothing I'd ever seen in a mainstream comic or anywhere else, and he seemed to burst upon the scene fully formed.

My first official exposure to Corben was most certainly the ad he ran in *RBCC* #68 (February 1970) for his amazing color poster of two nude figures on an alien plateau, preparing to do battle with shadowy beasties beyond a distant ridge. Unlike his earlier appearances in *Famous Monsters*, this one captured my imagination by the throat. It's a masterwork that still hangs on my wall to this day. Two issues later, in *RBCC* #70 (April 1970), he ran another ad, this time adding a black-and-white poster and announcing his forthcoming fanzine, Fantagor. *RBCC* #74 (September 1970) would feature his first cover for the adzine.

Someone at the comic book club had a copy of *Weirdom Illustrated* #13 (April 1969), with a beautiful duotone and textured cover and a stunning, book-length story, both drawn by Corben. The art for "Tales from the Plague" (written by publisher Dennis Cunningham) was a tour de force by this young artist, exuding the authenticity of having been drawn by someone who, instead of simply imagining the emotion and horror of a ravaging plague in the seventeenth century, had personally witnessed it.

I'd only been in fandom a few months, and a comics fan for only a couple of years, and Corben was permanently altering my perception of comics with his profoundly organic and visceral use of the medium. His first professional work was a cover for *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (September 1967), but I didn't know about that until years later. His first published comics story was the "Monsters Rule" series in *Voice of Comicdom* #12 (June 1968) through #15 (May 1969), but I didn't see that until it was reprinted in *Weirdom Comix* #15 (1972). I did, however, order *Voice of Comicdom* (*VoC*)#16, featuring part 1 of Corben's second groundbreaking work, "Rowlf," from an ad in *Dallascon Bulletin* #6 (Summer 1970). Like *Weirdom* #13, *VOC* #16 had a beautiful wraparound cover, this one in full color, and the interior art had evolved far beyond what we'd seen on "Tales from the Plague."

I still loved and collected mainstream comics, but Corben comics were another animal altogether. Around this same time, I'd happened upon a copy of *Zap Comix* #5, which further exploded my concepts of what comics could be. Crumb and Griffin and Williams and S. Clay Wilson were doing work that looked like the comics themselves had somehow taken acid and come out the other side completely transformed. Corben comics, on the other hand, were from another dimension, where time and space collided, and past, present, and future coalesced and birthed something uniquely cosmic. Not only that, but Corben's art was in a class of its own. His style was like no one else's, and it didn't suggest obvious influences from any other artist or periods of art. He didn't share a trajectory that so many other artists seemed to follow, where we saw his embryonic fan efforts in fanzines and watched him develop and grow over time. We didn't see any of his missteps or amateur efforts. "Monsters Rule" shows Corben at the beginning of his storytelling journey, and, even at that stage, he had already arrived at a distinctive style displaying a phenomenal command of craft.

When asked about his influences, he typically named Frank Frazetta, Wally Wood, and Alex Toth. In an interview in *Voice of Comicdom* #16, he said, "I would like to believe that all of the above gentlemen have influenced my style, but I haven't consciously tried to copy their work or style since I was in art school."

Fritz Leiber felt that Corben drew from influences dating back much further. In his introduction to the *Neverwhere* graphic novel, Leiber wrote that "the art traditions Richard Corben drew on in creating this remarkable book go back thirty thousand years and more—to Late Paleolithic man's cave paintings of hunters and their weapons, witchdoctors and their rituals, and a profusion of animals feared and revered...and many of their techniques were curiously modern—big posterish expanses of color, dramatic stick figures, the effect of airbrush got by blowing through hollow bones to break up paint fed through a similar tube into a fine spray." Even if only speaking hyperbolically, Leiber nailed the powerful and raw essence of Corben's work while also bringing another artist to mind—Jesse Marsh.

In an interview in *Mirk-Wood Times* #2 (March 1973), Corben said, "I was hooked on *Tarzan* comics when Jesse Marsh was drawing them. I know, nobody likes his art, except me. The artists that took over his books concentrated mainly on figure drawing and a kind of surface level of slickness. Manning, Hogarth, or Kubert can't draw animals that move and live the way Marsh could." And unlike with Frazetta or Wood or Toth, it is possible to see Jesse Marsh in Corben's work. The blunt simplicity of it, the fluidity of the storytelling, the realistic choreography and sense of motion, and the mise en scène which became Corben's trademark—all owe a lot to Marsh.

His admiration of Toth had a similar basis, and in an interview with Jan Strnad in *Infinity* #5 (1973), Corben said, "He doesn't take a lot of time to finish the work—what's great about it is the design and structural qualities and the way he lays out pages. The way he draws figures is realistic, not superhero style, so he doesn't get a great following. His individual panels have a nice linear quality to them...he takes no pains in modeling—it's just an outline drawing, a cartoon. He's concerned with the story as a whole instead of just individual panels."

This would certainly describe a lot of Corben's earliest work, but very quickly Corben would develop a style of drawing and painting that would in many cases combine the two mediums. And unlike Toth, Corben would take great pains with modeling his characters, even sculpting clay heads and figures to serve as three-dimensional references.

Toth was a fan of Corben, as well, so much so that he recommended him to Joe Kubert, presumably to work on Tarzan and war books, or perhaps to just get his foot in the door at DC Comics. "Kubert paved the way for me as a favor to Alex Toth," Corben told Strnad, "and he really felt put upon after I refused him. That's just conjecture, but it might be the case." Corben couldn't see "working for any of the establishment publishers." He didn't feel they would allow him the same freedom that he had with underground comix, fanzines, and Warren magazines.

One can only imagine what he would have done had he pursued Kubert's overture. Best-case scenario would have been doing war stories like the one he did many years later in Vertigo's *Weird War Tales* #1 (1997), but what else? Ghost stories for *House of Mystery* or a backup feature in *Korak, Son of Tarzan*? Maybe! Inking Dick Dillin on *Justice League of America*? Probably not. For Corben, mainstream comics were "like big business . . . and they mainly want something that sells, something as profit-making as possible." And at Marvel and DC, that did not mean "letting their artists have more freedom in what they write and draw." Despite having worked at an industrial animation studio, Corben wasn't the kind of artist who could be crowbarred into an assembly line. It would be decades before either Marvel or DC would evolve to the degree where Corben and his gifts would have a place.

In many ways, Corben saw himself as an amateur, in both filmmaking and comics, because, as an amateur, he could do whatever he wanted. His *Neverwhere* short film (1968) was exactly the film he wanted to make—animated, experimental, and entirely his own. In the *Mirkwood Times* interview, Corben said, "I'm an amateur at heart. By definition, an amateur is one who pursues an endeavor for the love of it as opposed to the professional

who does it for the money. There are many fields of commercial art that are much more lucrative than comics. I love comics."

As his career was unfolding, it seemed like Corben went from fanzines to undergrounds to Warren and *Heavy Metal* and beyond in phases, as though each arena represented a different segment in his career, but in looking at the timeline, it was really kind of happening all at once—or, at least, overlapping in a kind of snowball fashion. The fanzines did indeed come first. *Voice of Comicdom* #12 came out in June 1968, followed by *Weirdom Illustrated* #13 in April 1969. This was immediately followed in 1970 by stories and art in *Anomaly* #2 and *Squa Tront* #4, part 1 of "Rowlf," in *Voice of Comicdom* #16, and the first of many self-published titles, Fantagor #1.

Meanwhile, Corben was doing covers for *RBCC* (issues #74, #81, and #83). In the same month that his first *RBCC* cover appeared (September 1970), so did his first underground story, "Lame Lem's Love," in *Skull* #2. During this same period, he also wrote and drew his first story for James Warren, "Frozen Beauty," which was published in *Creepy* #36 (November 1970).

And as all that was happening, Corben's work began appearing in other underground comix—*Slow Death* and others. *Fantagor* the fanzine was reprinted by Last Gasp as *Fantagor* the underground in 1971, as Corben continued to contribute to fanzines such as *Anomaly* #3, *Promethean Enterprises* #3, and *Golden Age* #7, where he produced a brilliant portfolio of drawings based on various Conan stories.

But it was in the undergrounds that Corben really began to show his versatility, proving himself equally adept at horror, fantasy, science fiction, and humor. One of my favorites remains *Up from the Deep* (1971), blending both the acid trip of comix like Zap and the otherworldly vibe inherent to Corben's work. Especially stunning was the vibrant color work on the cover and his now-classic original story, "Cidopey."

Underground comix became my next drug of choice, with comics and fanzines still holding a very close second. Corben's underground work was unique even in that arena. He was bringing his love of EC Comics with him and putting it on the page. Corben and Gary Arlington were kindred spirits in their worship of EC, and Arlington created *Skull Comics* as a love letter to EC. Arlington, along with Greg Irons and Jack Jackson (a.k.a. Jaxon), are owed a debt of thanks for recruiting Corben to contribute. In *Rebel Visions: The Underground Comix Revolution 1963–1975*, Patrick Rosenkranz wrote that "Arlington traded [Corben] some EC comics" for the story in *Skull* #2. Rosenkranz quoted Corben as saying, "I thought Zap was the only underground comix and that they were produced by a closed group of artists. It was like a door had opened to a whole new universe of possibilities. Irons and Jaxon really helped me and pushed me toward other books."

And it was those "other books" that cemented Corben's reputation as an idiosyncratic creator and would later compel Harlan Ellison (in his introduction to New Tales of the Arabian Nights) to write, "There is a liquid quality to his art; an almost transparent, pellucid vibrancy that throws the work with three-dimensional verisimilitude."

Slow Death was the sister title to *Skull*, likewise finding its soul in the legacy of EC Comics while adding ecological awareness to the mix. I have a clear and treasured memory of buying *Slow Death* #4 in one of Miami's premier head shops—Twelve Coats West. This was when shops would actually staple the right side of the book so you couldn't open it, to prevent underage stoners like myself from checking out the mind-blowing but adult tales. But I bought virtually every underground that came out, anyway, so a prepurchase perusal wasn't necessary.

Fantagor #2 through #4 and *Grim Wit* #1 and #2 in 1972 and '73 continued in the vein of Corben's original fanzine, with *Grim Wit* #2 being significant for including the first appearance of Den and the first fifteen pages of *Neverwhere*.

Nineteen seventy-two proved to be a bountiful year when, along with the aforementioned titles, *Anomaly* #4 outgrew its fanzine origins and

became an underground comic with stories and art by Robert Kline and Corben. *Fever Dreams* and *Weird Fantasies* likewise had their roots in fanzines, with stories by John Adkins Richardson and Landon Chesney, in addition to those by Corben. It was a magical blend of all my obsessions, and where I once longed to publish my own fanzine, I now very much wanted to produce my own underground comic.

With Corben's address plainly featured in his ads, I wrote him a letter in 1973, asking questions about breaking into undergrounds and what the publishers paid and whatnot. He replied with a warm and honest letter, answering my questions and offering realistic insights into the health of the industry (which was a bit shaky at that point). That he took the time to reply and to do so with candor meant a lot to me.

This period was a game-changer for Corben, who had been looking for "a magazine with slick paper, reproduction quality, and fair pay rates," and he found that through "contact with Jean-Pierre Dionnet, who started running some of my underground stuff in his magazine *Metal hurlant*." By 1975, Corben began doing subsequent story chapters of *Neverwhere* in *Métal hurlant*, where it ran for four issues.

Corben's underground period ran concurrent to his time with Warren, and in many ways, his Warren work felt like an extension of his underground work. Corben's presence in *Creepy*, *Eerie*, and *Vampirella* was reason enough to buy any issue featuring one of his stories. Writing his own stories and collaborating with writers like Bruce Jones and Doug Moench, Corben amassed a body of work unequaled in the history of horror comics. Warren added color to the magazines when he got the rights to reprint Will Eisner's *The Spirit* and almost immediately tapped Corben to do the colors. Within a couple of issues, Corben was doing his own stories in color, bringing to Warren the same brilliance he'd shown in *Up from the Deep* and *Grim Wit*.

Classics like "In Deep," written by Bruce Jones and published in *Creepy* #83 (October 1976), take the elemental nightmare of Jaws and wed it to the horror of being stranded at sea. As a stand alone tale of traumatic terror, it's a textbook example of Corben's gifts—the Maxfield Parrish–like command of color, the realism of the body language and facial expressions, and the cinematic storytelling. Corben told *The Mirkwood Times* that he saw "comics as a shorthand version of movies. The comics have static highlights of a movie and depend upon the reader's imagination to fill in the movement and sound." And he made it very easy to do exactly that, creating that palpable sense of time and place that make his comics live and breathe.

Corben was still producing work for Warren when he did the *Bloodstar* graphic novel in 1976 and when he began contributing to *Heavy Metal* in 1977. *Heavy Metal* reprinted the first four chapters of *Den* from *Métal hurlant*", and Corben produced nine more brand-new chapters to complete the story.

For the casual observer, Richard Corben is defined by his work for *Heavy Metal*, and the rest of his work just settles around its feet, like lesser children. *Heavy Metal* unquestionably cemented Corben's reputation as an incomparable creator of international renown, especially when *Den 2: Muvovum* debuted in the September 1981 issue, showing Corben firing on all cylinders. Picking up where *Neverwhere* left off, *Muvovum* is a masterwork of fevered fantasy and horror, tempered with humor (Den in a suit and tie?) and Den's conflicting devotion to Kath and disdain for his earthly life as David Ellis Norman. But *Heavy Metal* was really the culmination of so much that had gone before—in the fanzines and underground comix and Warren's horror magazines—and it's that work that is, for me, the most significant and what I remember most fondly. Everything he did over the next forty-plus years was an extension of that. From *Hot Stuf'* to *The Bodyssey* to *Mutant World* to *Twisted* and *Aliens Worlds* to *Rip in Time* to his various Fantagor Press ventures and his work at DC, Marvel, and Dark Horse, the tone and tenor of Corben's work remained consistent. He grew and evolved as an artist, but he never attempted to reshape or reinvent

himself to adapt to a changing marketplace or cater to changing tastes, whatever those might have been. As many have said, including Bill Sienkiewicz and David Roach, Richard Corben was an American original. He stayed true to his passions and his creative instincts, and it was this consistency of vision that resulted in a body of work that will prove as enduring as the libraries of Poe and Lovecraft and as timeless as the output of Moebius.

That it took DC until 1996, and Marvel even longer, to grasp what Corben could do with some of their titles is inexplicable, because once he was turned loose on characters like the Hulk and Ghost Rider, it was evident that Corben was exactly what these properties needed. In a 2014 interview with Frédéric Poincelet, Corben said, "My first step into the mainstream was thanks to Mark Chiarello and his project, *Batman Black and White*. I had never done a superhero before and it was this quality or shortcoming that Mark wanted for his book. I did my best and apparently it was good enough. I then started doing non-hero stories for Axel Alonso's books at Vertigo. Each project led to the next."

In that same interview, Corben said, "Even after doing several mainstream hero and anti-hero books, I'm afraid my talent is not best suited for this kind of material," yet it was precisely his bravura approach to depicting brutal action with cinematic finesse that was so naturally suited to books like *Banner* (2001) from Marvel and *Bigfoot* (2005) from IDW. The artist who received such fame and acclaim for his iconic album cover—Meat Loaf's *Bat out of Hell* (1977)—was born to draw *Ghost Rider* #6 and #7 (2007). And Corben's version of the Punisher in *The End* (2004) is probably the most hardcore portrayal of Frank Castle ever committed to paper, as he brought the same kind of dystopian grit to its apocalyptic setting that he brought to Ellison's "A Boy and His Dog" in *Vic and Blood* (1987).

Banner, written by Brian Azzarello, is a brilliant take on the character that finally sets the Hulk in a story with real-world consequences, where his rampages level cities and people die amid the rubble. Bruce Banner is as depressed as anyone would be in his position, and he attempts suicide, only to turn into the Hulk the moment he pulls the trigger. We've seen him throw tanks and withstand missile attacks, but here we see him take a helicopter blade to the head only to keep on raging. Corben's Hulk is distinctly his own, at once savage, childlike, and relentless, with shades of a gleeful malevolence.

Though not intended as such, *Bigfoot*, written by Steve Niles and Rob Zombie, serves as a kind of companion piece to *Banner*. The titular character is brutish and unthinking, and the violence is unprovoked and equally fatal. And as with everything Corben has done, the violence is as impactful as anything in a film. *Bigfoot* is very much a horror film in graphic novel form, and probably the most unnerving work in Corben's catalog. For something that is, as Crumb once said, "only lines on paper," it's a truly frightening read, due predominantly to Corben's art.

His style matured in later years, and his flashback sequences in *Conan: Cimmeria* (Dark Horse, 2009) make the fact that he never drew Conan on a more regular basis seem like a real lost opportunity. More so than even Barry Windsor-Smith, John Buscema, or Alfredo Alcala, Corben made Conan's world tangible and epic. As with "Tales from the Plague" forty years earlier, his Conan pages have the luminosity of life, a genuine sense of place, and the coarse ambiance of a roughly hewn world. That's what Corben brought to his work from the very beginning—a feeling of reality that drew the reader into the story, no matter how fantastic or alien.

At eighty years old, Richard Corben was still in top form. He finished *Murky World* in time to see it collected, albeit in French. He also worked with Jan Strnad on a crowdfunded project that recolored and collected *Mutant World* and *Son of Mutant World*. And he was close to finishing something called *Dimwood*. Corben wasn't going to stop until death made it impossible to continue.

The passing of Richard Corben hit me like the passing of Bernie Wrightson. It was like

a friend had died. It hurt, because after more than fifty years in fandom and comics, he was a beloved presence whose work never ceased to astound and inspire. When I was adapting Tom De Haven's novel *Freaks' Amour* for Dark Horse, my fantasy was that Richard Corben would draw it. What a dream come true that would have been. The two fellows who did provide the art, Phil Hester and Ande Parks, did a fine job, but I'm sure they, too, would have loved to see what Corben would have done with it.

In his introduction to Corben's adaptation of *House on the Borderland* (Vertigo, 2000), Alan Moore described him as a "genuine giant of his chosen medium." Moebius is widely quoted as having said, "Richard Corben stands among us like an extraterrestrial peak. He has sat in his throne for a long time, above the moving and multicolored field of world comics, like an effigy of the leader, a strange monolith, a sublime visitor, a solitary enigma."

And in his passing, this enigmatic giant, this sublime visitor, this American original left an immense, unfillable void in his wake. But what remains is his matchless legacy. Like all great art, it will live on. Those coming later will discover it as we did and marvel at this singularly brilliant body of work.

In his book *Art Matters*, Neil Gaiman wrote, "Break rules. Leave the world more interesting for your being here. Make good art." Richard Corben did that, in spades.

Dana Marie Andra has a long history of writing about comics, film, music, and popular culture for *The Comics Journal*, *Comic Art*, *Filmfax*, *Alter Ego*, *Comic Book Marketplace*, *Charlton Spotlight*, *The Warren Companion* (hardcover edition), *Comics Buyer's Guide*, *Rocket's Blast Comicollector*, *Jazziz*, *Alternative Press*, and others, and writing comics for Dark Horse, Fantagraphics, Caliber, and Comico. She is currently editing *The Complete Web of Horror* for Fantagraphics.

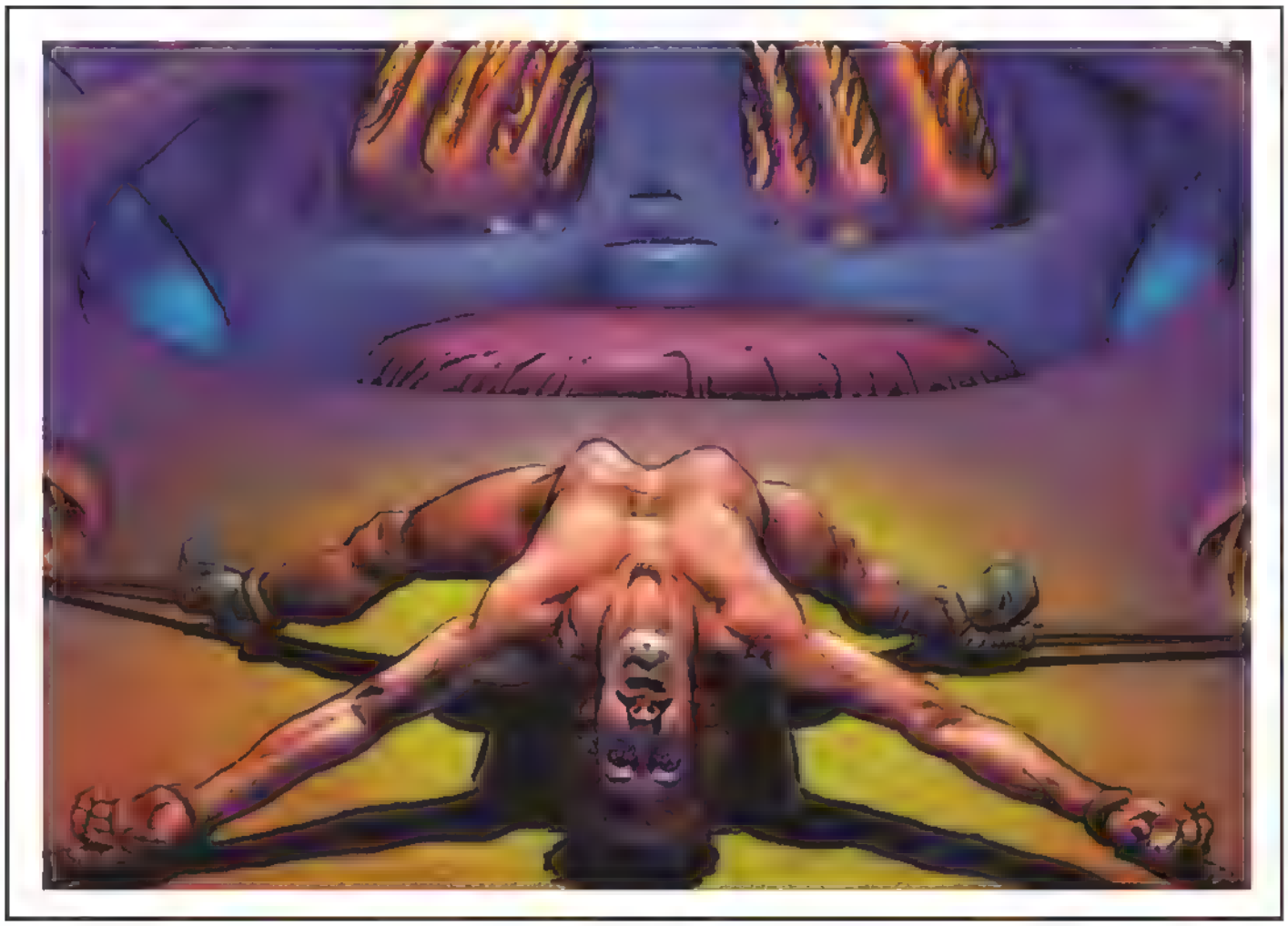
MUVOVUM

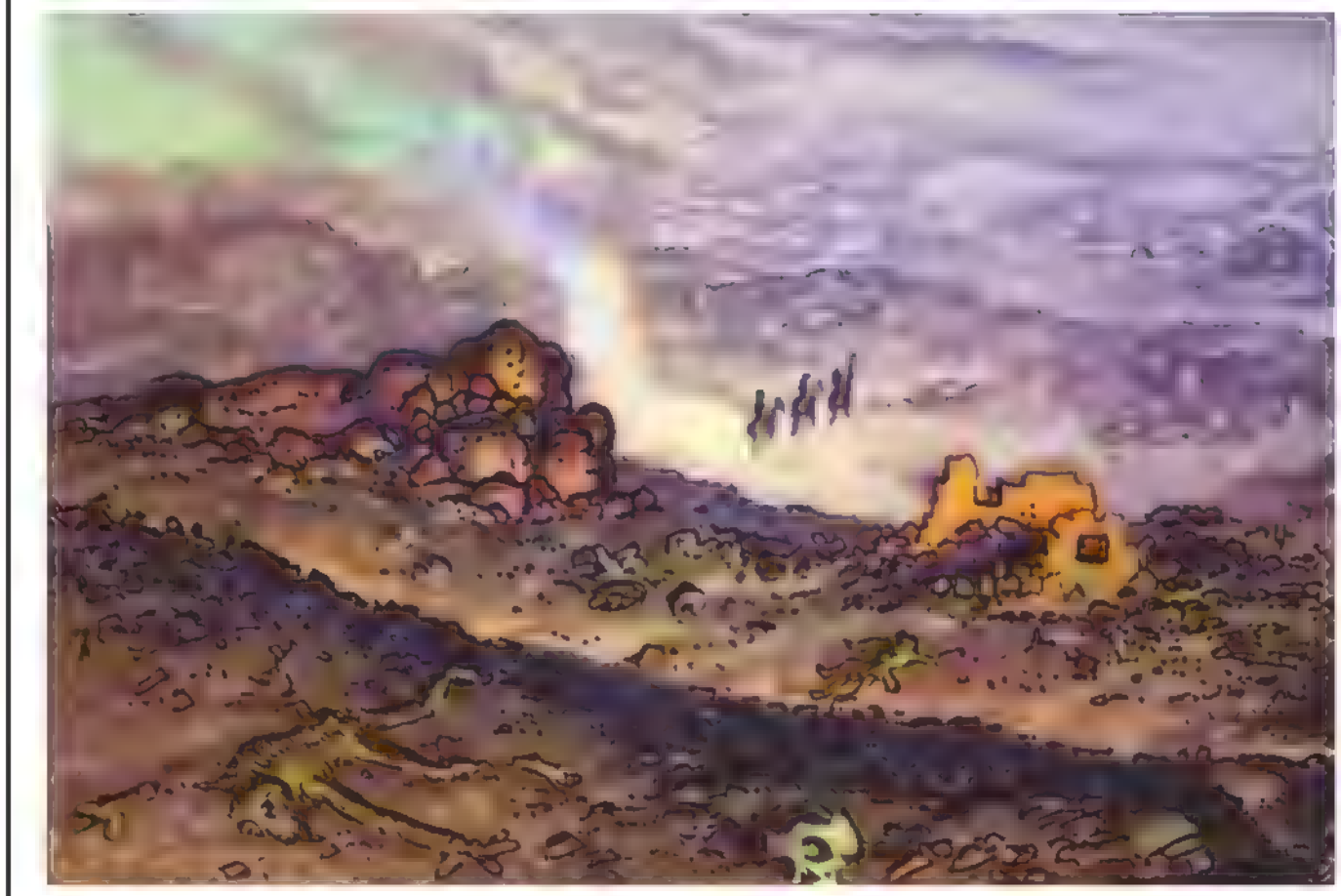
MAURICE HORN

From the extended backward-tracking sequence that opens the story to the final fadeout into infinity, all the familiar elements of Richard Corben's primal myth re-creating are here: the powerful, larger-than-life male hunter; the life-giving, death-bringing female vessel of ecstasy and dread; the ritual figures of old age and tradition; the grinning monsters lurking in the depths of the earth and the recesses of the mind; the foreboding landscape, at once sustaining and developing. And, surrounding it all, limitless space pulsating with life, with consciousness, with terror. This is a universe before time and beyond experience, a universe fittingly called Neverwhere.

It is not necessary for the reader to be acquainted with Den, the initial telling of the meeting of Den and Kath and their adventures in the strange new land, to enter this universe. One can start right here: The characters are so prototypical, the premises so basic that no other introduction is needed. In fact this is not a sequel, not a continuation, but a further exploration of Corben's chosen, almost obsessive themes. The call to action that Den hears is the same one that sparked Gilgamesh's quest, Hercules's labors, and Ulysses's reluctant sailing for Troy. Indeed it is with the same reluctance that Den embarks on his new mission, leaving behind him his sky-island paradise, his beloved Kath (both Eve and Penelope to him), and his hopes of returning to Earth, to home. But only one man can defeat the new perils facing Neverwhere and into his appointed rounds Den goes, because Man does as Man must.

Corben's art is as overwhelming—and as viscerally gripping—as his themes. Working in a deceptively simple, almost stylized fashion,





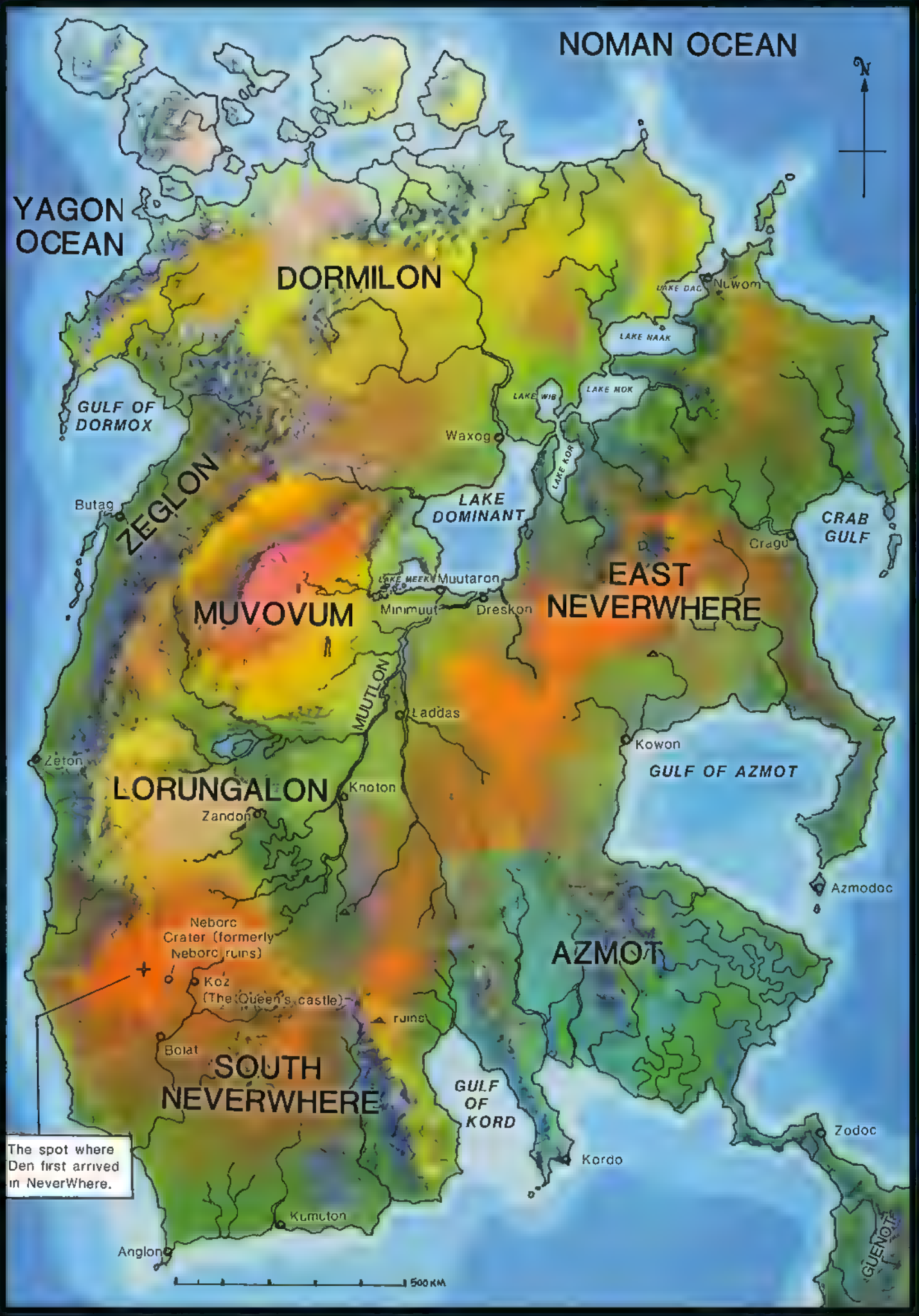
he goes from the literal to the symbolic, from the particular to the universal. His characters are no mere shadows of a cave, they are the real thing, essence made flesh. His men are models of virility, his women embodiments of sexuality—elemental earth figures. The action is relentless, tension builds upon unbearable tension, and the release, we know, will be temporary. Corben's compositions are plays of light and energy, his page layouts spasms of violent discontinuous action, splattered with expressionistic bursts of color. In this he recalls Burne Hogarth more than any other artist of the comics. But in his detailed rendering of the surreal and the demonic he goes back much further, to the illustrations of *The Book of the Dead*, to Hieronymus Bosch's garden of delights (and terrors), to William Blake's vision of hell.

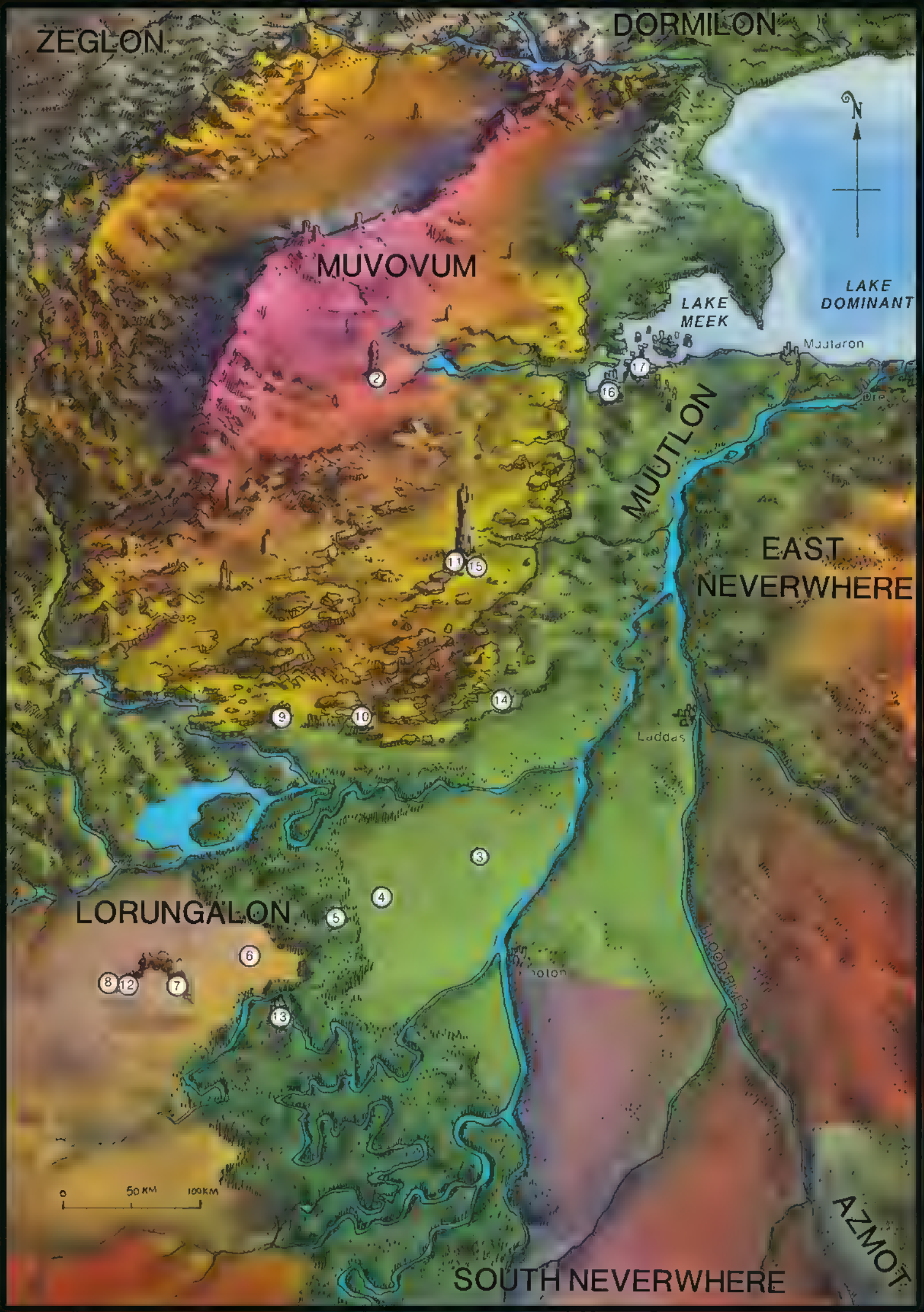
This, we are told, is a tale of fantasy. Fantasy, however, is a facile category, too often the refuge of the hack and the unimaginative, fearful of logic and truth. Not so Corben: His world has the logic of a far-flung vision, the truth of a dimly remembered collective dream. As in Lovecraft's stories, his demons are all too real, and the light of reason will not exorcise them. This is the land of Man's pre-mental, pre-logic terror; and if the sleep of reason does produce monsters, it also produces heroes to slay them.

Yet, where there is terror there should also be humor: Corben knows this truth well. It is no coincidence that the opening scene, with its so obviously staged air, should be reminiscent of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* (and is it not suspicious that the heroine be named Katherine?). In a letter Corben averred that his drawings show "a heroic idealism developed to such an extreme degree as to be slightly satirical and tongue-in-cheek." This is a lesson we should remember from Corben's earliest stories up to and including this one. All of the artist's narrative strands are in fact gathered in this volume: heroic fantasy, speculative fiction, horror play, all liberally sprinkled with sex and humor. In this aspect, as well as in the power of its images, this is quintessential Corben. But enough talk, let the images roll in . . .

Maurice Horn
New York City, May 1983

MAPS OF NEVERWHERE




ZEGLON
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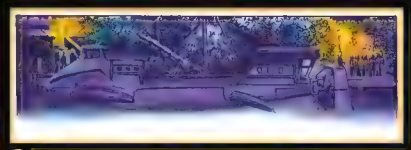
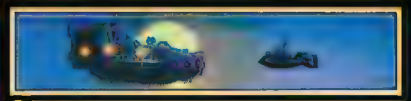
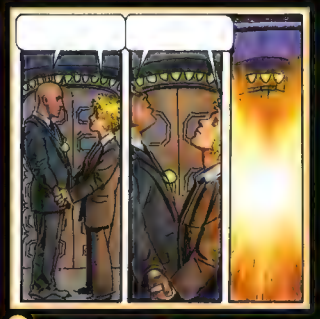


1 The ship sets out from Zegium to find the Stones of Nar. If you can't find number one on the map it's due to its being off the page, approximately 5 inches to the right. (PAGE 14)

2 The Tower of the Stones of Nar. (PAGE 17)



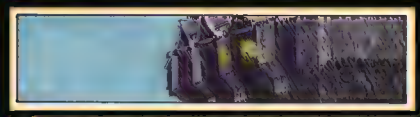
3 The ship returns to Zegium. (PAGE 23)



4 Den and Kath leave Zegium. (PAGE 25)

5 Tarn, crazed with jealousy, goes after Muuta on Den's flying lizard. (PAGE 27)

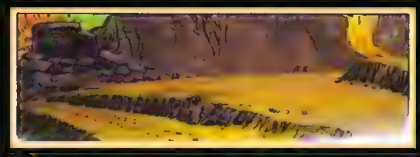
6 Scon sends a search party after Tarn. (PAGE 28)



7 After drugging Zeg, Scon takes the magic Stones of Nar and sets out toward the South in Zegium's only surviving ship. (PAGE 28)

8 The queen arrives in Zegium. Thwarted in her attempt to find the Stones of Nar, she burns the entire floating complex. (PAGES 29-32)

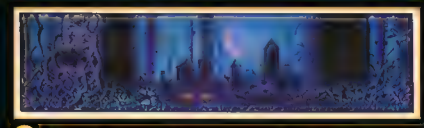
9 The search party finds Tarn and Den's dead lizard. (PAGE 33)



10 Tarn and Moda lose their way on the return trip and enter Muvovum. (PAGE 34)

11 The gigantic fortress of the Dramites where Tarn is held prisoner. (PAGE 58)

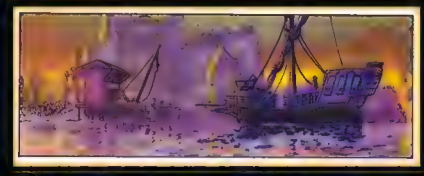
12 Den returns alone and wanders through the desert. (PAGE 45)



13 Zandon, the city of the Lorungan, where Den becomes friends with Zandor and his daughter Wyn. (PAGE 62)

14 Den sees the Dramites advancing from Muvovum. He returns to the North looking for Tarn. (PAGE 68)

15 Den and Muuta are attacked by a second group of Dramites. (PAGE 75)



16 Den and Muuta reach Mini-muut. (PAGE 85)

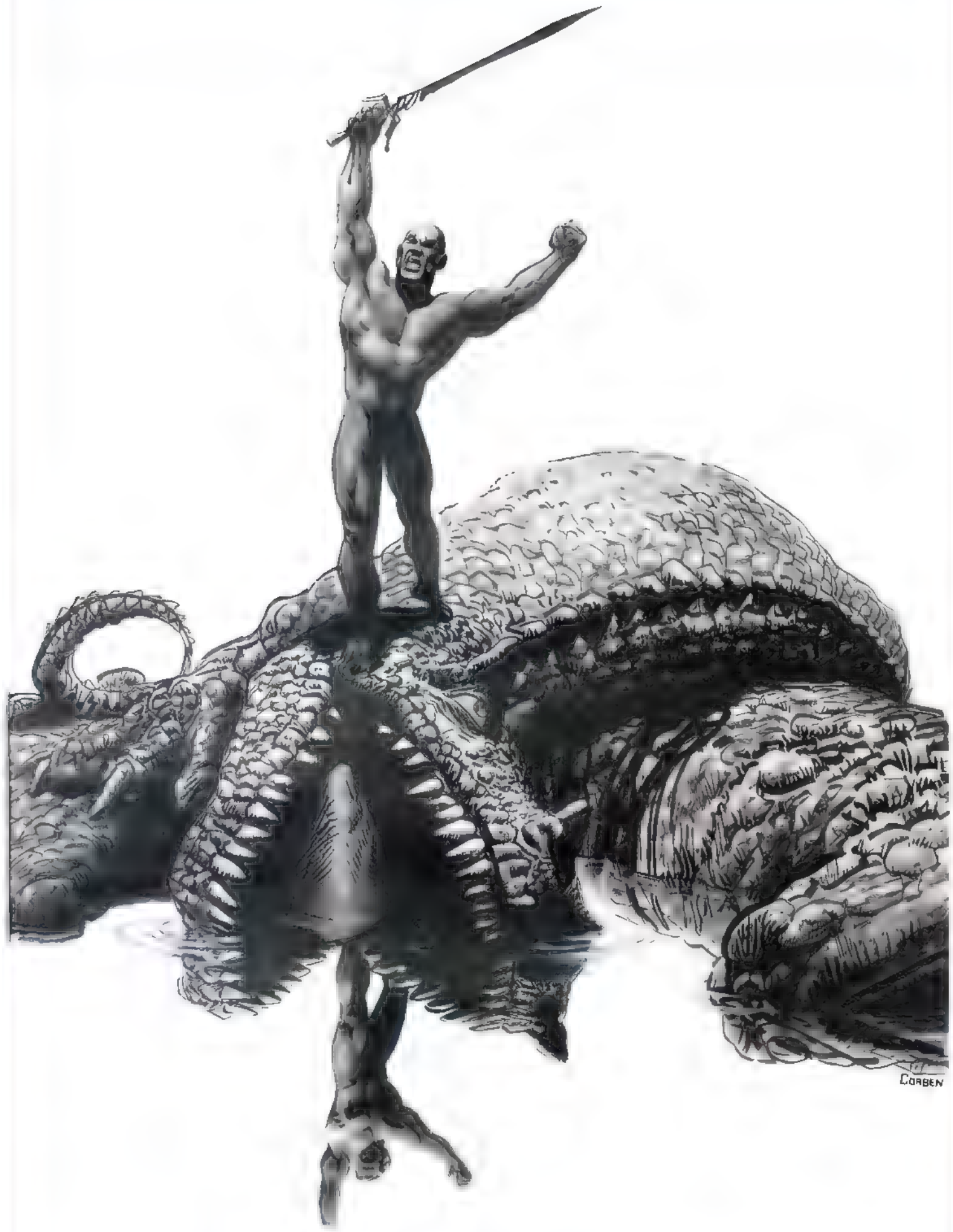
17 Den escapes the destruction and is taken to the coast by an old friend. (PAGE 104)

DEN GALLERY

"Den and Kath," 1994

"Den, Kath, and the Red Queen," 1995

Original Frontispiece from the First Edition, 1984



"Den Dragonslayer," *I'll Be Damned* #2, 1970

Richard Corben was born in Missouri and grew up in Sunflower, Kansas, a community that worked for the Sunflower Ordnance Works, an army plant that manufactured bombs in World War II.

Corben drew comics all of his life. An early effort was a series of comics about the adventures of TRAIL, the family dog. Later, he created imitations of Tarzan and Brothers of the Spear. He also showed a keen interest in animation by turning many pads of paper into animated flipbooks.

While attending the Kansas City Art Institute, he concentrated on basic drawing and painting, developing skills that would become vital in creating his chosen realistic style. At that time, his college offered no courses for animation, but by using his father's 8 mm movie camera, Corben nevertheless produced a 5-minute animated film highlighting the labors of Heracles as his senior project.

After graduation, Corben wanted to go to New York to launch a career in comics or animation, but he was shy and timid, and put off such a drastic move. After working in construction for his father for a while, he found a local job as an artist/animator/cameraman in a Kansas City industrial film company. During this time, despite his shyness, he found a girl to marry him.

After nearly ten years at the film company, Corben felt frustrated that he really hadn't given his art career a chance. He started drawing so-called "underground" comix and fanzines at night after working a full-time job during the day. About this same time, Warren Publishing Company began a series of black-and-white horror comics, CREEPY, EERIE, and VAMPIRELLA. This was a perfect match for Corben's interests, and he drew several stories for CREEPY on speculation. Unfortunately, none of these were accepted. But the "wannabe" comic book artist persisted and even met James Warren at a science fiction convention. Finally, Warren and his editor, Bill Dubay, relented and started sending Corben scripts to draw. At last, a foothold was established in his comic career. Even with the responsibilities of a wife, a daughter and a mortgage, the young artist now felt confident enough to quit his full-time job at the industrial film company and devote all his time to drawing.

The underground comix surge spread to Europe, and requests to reprint Corben underground features began to appear. His fantasy character, DEN, was created for the American underground comic, GRIM WIT; DEN was next printed in the French METAL HURLANT, and then printed in the American HEAVY METAL. During this era, Richard and Dona started FANTAGOR PRESS, a publishing company featuring Richard's comics. Unfortunately, the business wasn't enough to support them. Next, Corben began drawing for American comics—D.C., MARVEL, DARK HORSE, and others.

Corben believed that maintaining drawing skills required constant practice. He regularly attended life drawing classes all throughout his career. He found the activity both an ongoing challenge and a source of pleasure.

His love and interest in animation continued throughout his lifetime and motivated him to create digitally animated movies he shared on his web site and Facebook page.

Richard was married for 56 years to Dona, and is the father of watercolor artist and comic book colorist, Beth. His life and love was devoted to his family and his art. He was a humble man and an extremely kind, good man.

Richard Corben died December 2, 2020.

RICHARD CORBEN'S MASTERPIECE AT LAST BACK IN PRINT AFTER DECADES!

Well known for his legendary fantasy underground masterpieces published by Fantagor Press as well as *Heavy Metal*, Richard Corben's work has been recognized internationally having been awarded one of the most prestigious recognitions in comics literature, the Grand Prix at Angoulême, as well having been inducted into the Will Eisner Award Hall of Fame.

Den and Kath's bizarre journey in Neverwhere continues as they leave their floating island home for magical stones that can transport them back to Earth. Along the way, trouble arrives as the evil Queen seeks the stones for her own evil purposes, and Den's friend is kidnapped and imprisoned in the horrific monster country known as Muvovum.

Den: Muvovum is the next book in a series of deluxe graphic novels from renowned creator Richard Corben's library to be published by Dark Horse Comics. This special edition collects the second volume of the long out-of-print *Den* with lettering by Nate Piekos of Blambot and artwork restored from originals by long-time Corben collaborator José Villarrubia. It features bonus materials, an introduction by Walt Simonson, a gallery section, and additional essays by Villarrubia, Maurice Horn, and Dana Marie Andra, presented in a gorgeous hardcover with a dust jacket.

"The artist I most want to aspire to is Richard Corben. His style is visual and it tells the story just as you see it . . . my favorite is Corben. I love everything he does. I love his stuff . . . he's an amazing artist."
–GUILLERMO DEL TORO

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